

**CHARITY, RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT:
CHRISTIAN AID IN ETHIOPIA
1960s-1990s**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about a charity, Christian Aid (CA) and the experience of that charity working in Ethiopia over three decades. The thesis looks at the evolving capabilities of CA in the world of relief and development. It asks whether CA has learned anything from its experience.

The study looks at CA from the beginning of the 1960s through major famines and through a process by which charities have grown from small apolitical organisations to prominent political players, both in the southern countries where they work, and in the northern countries where they undertake publicity, lobby and advocacy. With changing priorities and demands on aid, practical experience on its own, has not been enough to ensure a coherent institutional response. There is a significant danger that CA has not had time to reflect on what has happened. This thesis provides an institutional memory, a historical reflection on CA's own development.

The thesis sets CA in the context of development in general and Ethiopia in particular. It looks at the charity as an organisation, at its evolution and positioning within the broader institutional and theoretical setting. It explores the different levels of policy and concern within the organisation. The various paradigm shifts in development policy over the past 30 years are examined, setting up debates that had real meaning for the charity around a set of specific policy concerns in Ethiopia. The main body of analysis focuses on CA's performance in Ethiopia. The charity's experience of famine in the mid-1970s and mid-1980s is explored and its response analysed. How CA articulated development policies in Ethiopia from the late 1980s is examined. Throughout, the focus is on how CA has positioned its mandate, how theory related to practice and how the experiences of the past have informed the present.

CONTENTS

Glossary of Abbreviations	iv
List of Tables and Charts	v
List of Maps	v
Map of Ethiopia, Provinces and Major Towns	vi

Introduction: <u>The Challenges of Charity</u>	1
1. Christian Aid: a non-governmental organisation	2
2. Institutionalising Memory	8
3. Theory and Interpretation	11
4. Method and Sources	14
5. Chapter Outline	17

Chapter 1: <u>The Institutional History of Christian Aid: a process of adaptation</u>	21
1. The Origins of Christian Aid 1945 to c. 1960	21
2. The Evolution of Christian Aid 1960-90	28
2.1 A development mandate & the social justice debate 1960-73	28
2.2 1974-75: the watershed years	40
2.3 The search for professionalism: clarifying objectives and strategy	49
2.4 1987: the year of commitments	55
3. Christian Aid in the 1990s	58
4. A Process of Adaptation Reconsidered	66

Chapter 2: <u>Christian Aid, Famine, Relief and Development: a theoretical perspective</u>	74
1. Conceptions of Famine: understanding its nature and causes	75
2. Disaster Relief: the difficulties and effects of responding to crisis	81
2.1 The theoretical setting	82
2.2 The institutional setting	87
3. Sustainable Development: exploring its meaning	96

3.1	No shortcuts to progress	96
3.2	New approaches to sustainable development: rethinking the relief-development continuum	101
4.	Conclusion	107
Chapter 3:	<u>The 1971-75 Ethiopian Famine</u>	108
1.	'Famine' Discovered	109
1.1	Vulnerability to famine in rural Ethiopia	112
1.2	Profile of the famine 1971-75	120
1.3	A political economy of famine in Ethiopia 1971-75	126
2.	Christian Aid and the 1971-75 Famine	139
2.1	A background to Christian Aid and famine in Ethiopia	139
2.2	Christian Aid and the 1971-75 famine	142
3.	Groping For a New Role	155
Chapter 4:	<u>The 1983-85 Ethiopian Famine: 'function' re-examined</u>	162
1.	War and Famine	166
1.1	The state and famine relief 1983-85	175
2.	The International Politics of Relief	179
3.	Conclusion	190
Chapter 5:	<u>The Ethiopian Famine 1983-85: a political economy framework for action</u>	194
1.	The Emergency Relief Desk 1981-85	195
2.	Organisational Adaptation in Conflict Situations: the Emergency Relief Desk in Ethiopia 1981-91	200
3.	The Cross-Border Operation Evaluated 1981-91	215
4.	Christian Aid in Ethiopia 1981-91: an analysis of capability	234
Chapter 6:	<u>Christian Aid and Rural Development in Southern Ethiopia 1985-97</u>	241
1.	'Alternative' Development: theory and practice	242
2.	A New Storyline: reality or rhetoric?	248

2.1	The plan	249
2.2	The outcome	252
2.3	Discussion	259
3.	Christian Aid and the Freedom From Hunger Campaign Programme in southern Ethiopia 1985-97	261
4.	Understanding Development: lessons for Christian Aid	266
Conclusion: <u>Lessons: the past historic and the future imperfect</u>		270
1.	Christian Aid and lessons from the past	270
2.	Christian Aid and lessons for the future	282
2.1	Broadening the research agenda	282
2.2	Linking good practice with good theory	285
2.3	Development education	290
Bibliography		293

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Christian Aid
ERA	Eritrean Relief Association
ERD	Emergency Relief Desk
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
FAD	Food Availability Decline
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FFHC	Freedom From Hunger Campaign
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ORA	Oromo Relief Association
REST	Relief Society of Tigray
TPLF	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
UN	United Nations
WCC	World Council of Churches

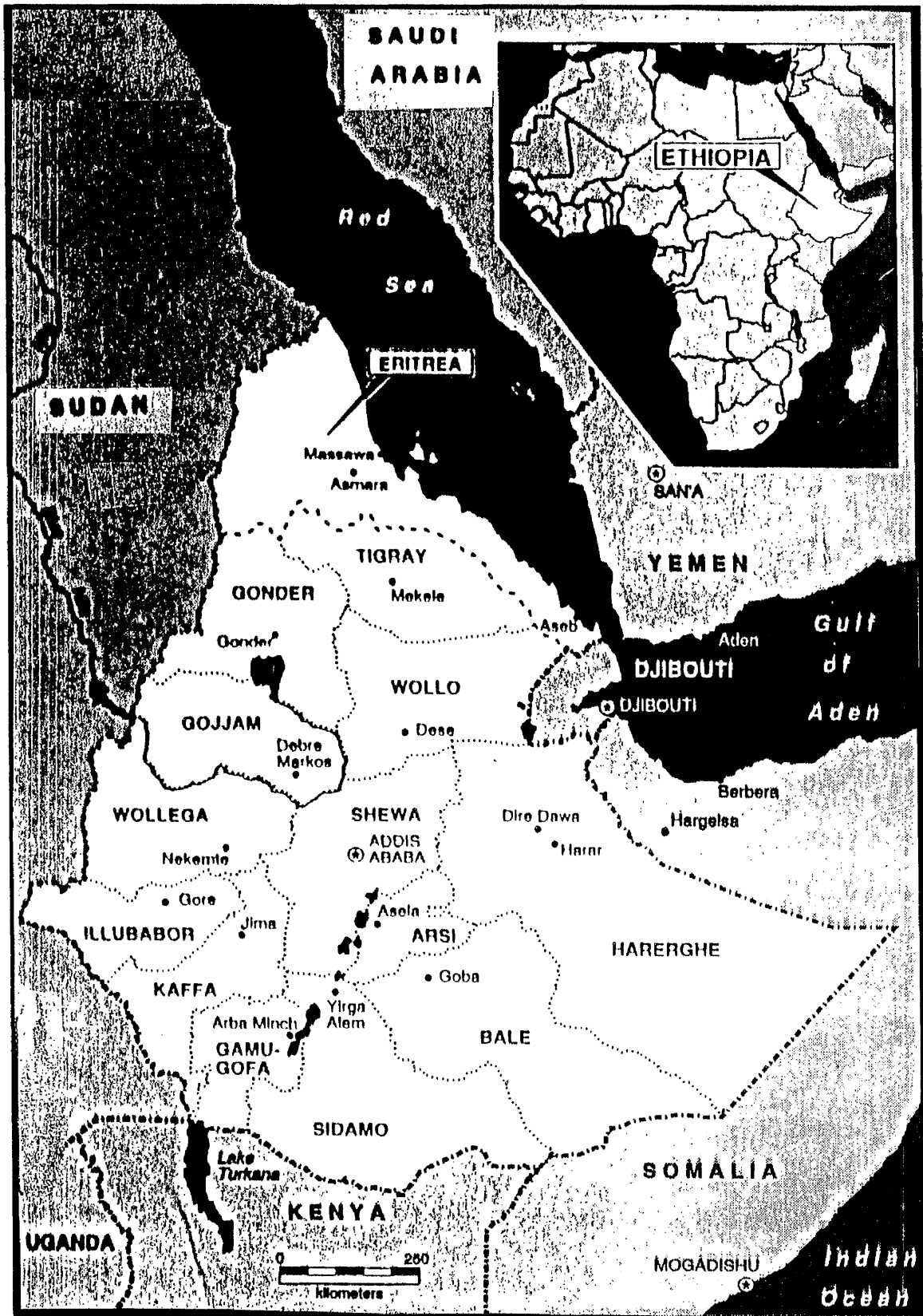
LIST OF TABLES AND CHARTS

1.1	Christian Aid: Income from Official Sources (£) 1982-89	50
1.2	Christian Aid: Major Sources of Income (£) 1970-79	70
1.3	Christian Aid: Analysis of Project Expenditure (£) 1970-79	71
1.4	Christian Aid: Major Sources of Income (£) 1980-89	72
1.5	Christian Aid: Analysis of Project Expenditure (£) 1980-89	73
3.1	Cereals Production and Net Food Availability Per Caput 1972-84	114
3.2	History of Drought and Famine in Ethiopia	159
4.1	Main Feature of Warnings of and Responses to the 1983-85 Ethiopian Famine	192
5.1	Christian Aid Grants to Ethiopia (£) 1979-1984	199
5.2	Cash Programmes in Tigray 1982-87	226
5.3	Cash Programmes in Eritrea 1982-87	226
5.4	Emergency Relief Desk: Cash Donations 1981-91	238
5.5	Emergency Relief Desk: Cash Donations Per Donor 1981-91	239
5.6	Emergency Relief Desk: Food Donations 1981-91	239
5.7	Emergency Relief Desk: Total Donations 1981-91	240

LIST OF MAPS

3.1	Ethiopia: Topography	111
3.2	Ethiopia: famine stricken zones 1971-75	123
4.1	Northern Ethiopia 1983-85	165

Map: Ethiopia - Provinces and Major Towns



Source: Africa Watch, *Evil Days: 30 years of war and famine in Ethiopia*, (Human Rights Watch: New York, 1991)

Introduction THE CHALLENGES OF CHARITY

This study is about a charity, Christian Aid (CA) and the experience of that charity working in Ethiopia over three decades.¹ A prominent and long-established British aid agency, CA has been involved in the major post-war disasters, its development grants go to over seventy countries in the world, it has a strong campaigning and lobbying profile, and an impressive international reputation. This thesis looks at the evolving capabilities of CA in the world of relief and development. It asks whether CA has learned anything from its experience.

There are three reasons for writing a thesis on this subject. One is that the role of CA in particular and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in general are expanding and that within what has been dubbed the 'new world order'², they are increasingly acting as mechanisms of international public policy. The contemporary aid industry has become an important subject of discussion and research.³ The hope that research and practical thought about charity may benefit from a historical perspective is one reason for this first attempt to provide one.

¹ For the sake of clarity within this analysis, Eritrea (which gained independence from Ethiopia in April 1993) is included in references to Ethiopia.

² The 'new world order' constitutes the post-Cold War balance of power in North-South relations envisioned by President Bush in his inaugural speech. It was hoped that the end of the cold war would establish the habit of co-operation between the superpowers and that the United Nations would thus be able to fulfill its intended role as the framework for a world society in which disputes would be settled without war. In the literature on the aid industry, the 'new world order' is characterised by the enhanced role of NGOs, in which such things as the principle of non-interference, especially in relation to humanitarian aid, is less firmly supported. See Mark Duffield & John Prendergast, *Without Troops & Tanks: humanitarian intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Red Sea Press: New Jersey, 1994) pp. 9 & 64; Michael Edwards & David Hulme (eds.), *Non-Governmental Organisations - Performance and Accountability: beyond the magic bullet* (Earthscan for SCF (UK): London, 1995), pp. 17, 20 & 31

³ For discussion of the contemporary aid industry see Mark Duffield, 'Complex emergencies and the crisis of developmentalism' *IDS Bulletin*, 25 (October 1994), pp. 37-45; Mark Duffield, 'NGOs, disaster relief and asset transfer in the Horn: political survival in a permanent emergency' *Development and Change*, 24 (1993), pp. 131-157; Mark Duffield, 'Famine, conflict and the internationalisation of public welfare' in Martin Doornbos et al. (eds.), *Beyond Conflict in the Horn: the prospects for peace, recovery and development in Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan* (Institute of Social Studies in association with James Currey: The Hague, 1992), pp. 49-61; African Rights, *Humanitarianism Unbound? Current dilemmas facing multi-mandate relief operations in political emergencies* Discussion Paper No. 5 (African Rights: London, November 1994); John Borton, 'Recent trends in the international relief system' *Disasters*, 17 (1993), pp. 187-201; Edwards & Hulme (eds.), *Non-Governmental Organisations*; Ian Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar: altruism under fire - non-profit organisations and international development* (Intermediate Technology Publications: London, 1995); Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (I. B. Tauris & Co.: London, 1993)

The second reason for writing this thesis is the belief that lessons have not been learned and mistakes, both logistical and conceptual, repeated. The inevitable qualitative and interpretive nature of NGO evaluation and the absence of formal mechanisms for analysis have created enormous problems for institutional learning. Evaluations are typically internal, under-funded, and subjective. To escape such defects requires a history: a broad time-frame and a co-ordinated analysis of experience. The history of CA in Ethiopia permits an experiment in establishing institutional memory.

The third reason is personal. Unless properly analysed, charity may become marred by unfair criticism or misplaced acclaim. The aim is to identify major characteristics about CA, to treat CA as a social institution and so provide a historical tool for future debate. The intention is to reflect on the origins, meaning, limits and possibilities of CA's development and relief interventions.

1 . Christian Aid: a non-governmental organisation

CA is an important social institution, active at the cutting edge of the divide between the industrialised world and the developing world. CA's income in 1996 exceeded £39 million.⁴ Among British Third World charities its performance was bettered only by Oxfam and Save the Children Fund.⁵ Development grants constituted the largest item of expenditure. In 1996, £16.5 million was allocated for development work. A further £11.2 million was spent on emergencies and refugee programmes.⁶ The charity does not have its own staff on overseas station. It makes grants to partners, and these are drawn in roughly equal measure from local churches, Christian-inspired organisations and secular bodies. In 1996, it had 214 partner organisations in Africa. Around the world, the total was 671.⁷ Early on, the senior staff in CA decided that the organisation should attempt to influence public opinion in Britain with respect to the need for government policies sympathetic towards the Third World. By the late 1960s

⁴ CA, *Annual Review 1995-96* (CA: London, 1996)

⁵ Peter J. Burnell, *Charity, Politics and the Third World* (Harvester Wheatsheaf: London, 1991), p. 54

⁶ CA, *Annual Review 1995-96*

⁷ *ibid.*

the charity was claiming that to remain silent in Britain 'is to be highly political, since it means that we are content for the status quo to continue.'⁸ The charity's refrain was barely any different twenty years later:

'We and our government have still to learn that the west's affluence is one of the causes of world poverty; that we ourselves are part of the problem, and therefore hold the key to part of the solution.'⁹

Christian Aid has associated itself with controversial positions, such as its condemnation of the Nicaraguan contras and their American backers, and by calling quite openly for economic sanctions against South Africa. The charity's trustees allowed up to 10% of income to be spent on development education and public campaigning. By 1996, £3.6 million - an amount equivalent to 9.6% of its total expenditure - was being spent in this way.¹⁰

Through its major annual fund-raising event - Christian Aid Week, its involvement in disaster relief, its strong campaigning profile and its presence in the local community as a focus for voluntary service and as a member of the Church, CA by the 1990s was a household name. CA had also acquired a heightened prominence on the international stage. This reflected important changes in the charity's operating environment. To explain such change, we need to look at the broader institutional and policy environment within which CA has existed and the context of changing North-South relations.

The aid industry as a whole has expanded and been significantly transformed over the last 10-15 years. The 1980s were judged by Hellinger to have been the decade of NGOs.¹¹ The number of development NGOs registered in the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development countries of the industrialised North grew from 1,600 in 1980 to 2,970 in 1993; the total spending of these NGOs rising over the same period from US\$ 2.8 billion to US\$ 5.7 billion in 1995 prices.¹² The increase in CA's total spending was from £5.7 million in 1980 to £36.2 million in 1996. In the

⁸ Cited in Burnell, *Charity, Politics and the Third World*, p. 55

⁹ CA, *Annual Report 1985-86* (CA: London, 1986)

¹⁰ CA, *Annual Review 1995-96*

¹¹ D. Hellinger, 'NGOs and the large aid donors: changing the terms of engagement' *World Development*, 15 Supplement (1987), pp. 135-144

¹² Edwards & Hulme (eds.), *Non-Governmental Organisations*, p. 3

1990s, the access of NGOs to decision-makers in both North and South was greater than ever before, as their advocacy role expanded and they were courted in debates over policy and practice. In many situations, NGOs were the chief providers of public welfare, but even more significantly, and increasingly in the Horn of Africa, they acted as news agencies and diplomats. NGOs were seen as vehicles for 'democratisation' and essential components of a thriving 'civil society'. In this respect, NGOs were seen to act as a counter-weight to state power - protecting human rights, opening up channels of communication and participation, providing training grounds for activists and promoting pluralism.

Governments channeled increasing amounts of official aid to and through NGOs. The proportion of total aid from Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries channeled through NGOs increased from 0.7% in 1975 to 3.6% in 1985, and at least 5% in 1993-4.¹³ For CA, total government grants rose from £10,000 in 1976 to £13.1 million in 1996, equivalent to one-third of total income. In general bilateral agencies were spending a steadily increasing proportion of their aid budgets through NGOs and most NGOs depended on these donors for an increasing slice of their total budgets. As one analysis concluded, 'the overall picture is one in which NGOs are seen as the "favoured child" of official agencies and something of a panacea for the problems of development.'¹⁴ A number of factors contributed to these trends. These included the perceived failure of official aid agencies - bilateral and multilateral - and of national governments to effectively promote development and to raise the standard of living of the world's poor; the unprecedentedly large financial contributions channeled through NGOs such as CA during the African famines of the mid-1980s that focused attention on NGOs' effectiveness in dealing with emergencies and relief; and donor country governments' ideological preference for 'private sector' development and for the encouragement of pluralistic political systems.

Not so clear were the broader implications of these trends and what NGOs like CA should have been doing to prepare for the future: as one analyst said, 'to fashion

¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 4-5

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 5

change' rather than to react to 'changing fashions.'¹⁵ There was a growing awareness that the expanding and changing role of NGOs had not been systematically documented or assessed. As a result, in the 1980s NGOs began to come under scrutiny. At issue was not just the expanded importance and scale of NGO activities but the nature of their changed operating environment and the direction of international public policy. Some authors argued that with the end of the Cold War, and parallel to processes of economic reform and the rolling back of state structures, a significant shift in the international aid system away from development investment towards relief assistance for the South had occurred.¹⁶ To a large part, this was in support of relief programmes in situations of armed conflict in the post-Cold War 'new world order'. What some termed 'military humanitarianism' was occurring, characterised by negotiated access and the erosion of national sovereignty.¹⁷ Within such operations, the emphasis was on separating political from humanitarian relief. In other words, short-term relief assistance was becoming a substitute for foreign policy among some Northern countries in Africa.¹⁸

This process of substitution could be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s and the phenomenal growth of NGOs in response to emergencies generated by conflicts, mainly in the Horn of Africa. The Biafran war in 1968-1970 first established a precedent for aid agencies, like CA, operating within countries without the authorisation of the state.¹⁹ But it was not until the mid-1980s, during the wars and famines in the Horn of Africa, that NGOs, under the banner of neutrality and humanitarianism, crossed borders and reached places the United Nations could not, constrained as it was by Cold War politics from intervening politically. The cross-border operations supported by CA into Eritrea and Tigray and analysed in this thesis are examples of

¹⁵ Tim Brodhead, 'NGOs: in one year, out the other?' *World Development*, 15 Supplement (1987), p. 1

¹⁶ Borton, 'Recent trends in the international relief system', pp. 187-201

¹⁷ See Duffield, 'Complex emergencies', pp. 37-45; African Rights, *Humanitarianism Unbound?*

¹⁸ Mark Adams & Mark Bradbury, *Conflict and Development: organisational adaptation in conflict situations* Discussion Paper No. 4 (Oxfam: Oxford, 1995), p. 20

¹⁹ For an analysis of the Biafran humanitarian crisis and of Jointchurchaid, the relief operation organised by 33 European and North American church agencies, including CA, without the authorisation of the Nigerian state see Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar*, pp. 101-106; Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media*, pp. 92-108; Maggie Black, *A Cause For Our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years* (Oxfam & Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992), pp. 117-131; John de St Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 1975)

this. In these operations, CA and others, covertly provided a channel for donor funds into rebel areas. At the close of the 1980s, the first United Nations mandated cross-border operations emerged.²⁰ This set a pattern for a division of labour that subsequently became formalised in sub-contracting relations between the United Nations, donor governments, and NGOs.

There were five main concerns about this changing operating environment for NGOs. Firstly, that the merging of aid and foreign policy meant that decisions on humanitarian aid and human rights were being increasingly dictated by geopolitical considerations rather than human need. For some, this raised the spectre of a new form of colonialism. Secondly, that expenditure on high profile emergency operations was diverting resources from non-emergency development investment. Thirdly, that the new 'contracting era' was placing the independence of NGOs' in jeopardy. Fourthly, that relief assistance was becoming the North's principal means of political crisis management in the South and that this represented an institutional accommodation by the North to political crises and conflict in the South. Short-term relief threatened to reduce aid to a technical fix, detracting from a search for long-term solutions. Negotiated access programmes, while retaining an aura of neutrality, effectively legitimised the military protagonist in the conflict. Finally, that NGOs were simply not capable of fulfilling their expanded role within the new policy environment. Historically used to working within a confined 'humanitarian space' defined by governments in their own self-interest, NGOs, in the 1990s, were being increasingly drawn into political emergencies where they were subject to an uncertain and unique set of rules and constraints. For CA, this meant involvement in such places as Angola, Rwanda and Somalia. As one writer on NGOs commented:

'the disasters that scar the "new world order" test the very limits of altruism, drawing NGO leaders into heated political controversy and their front-line workers more and more frequently into dangerous, unfriendly fire. The financial, political and developmental implications of the increasingly terrible disasters that seem to mark the world have been enormous for NGOs, raising profound questions that go to the root of what they are, what they do, and who they answer to.'²¹

²⁰ Examples include south Sudan, Ethiopia and Angola. See Duffield, 'Complex emergencies', p. 41

²¹ Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar*, p. 98

A leading advocacy group, African Rights, has been at the forefront of calls for an evaluation of the new expansive role that NGOs, like CA, have taken on. It argued that 'the components of the "enlarged mandates" of relief NGOs may sometimes be in serious conflict, presenting fundamental dilemmas'²² and that whenever there was a clash between the charitable imperative on one hand, and on the other, principles of justice, rights, conflict resolution and advocacy, fund-raising NGOs would always go with the charitable imperative. They would submerge and sometimes subvert more important questions which in the long run might reduce the need for charity: 'To pretend that mandates do not conflict, and that humanitarianism can provide a political and human rights programme, would be a dangerous dishonesty.'²³ African Rights expressed concern that aid agencies were 'expanding into a void left by the contracting power of host governments and the declining political interest of western powers' and that it was 'a void they cannot fill.'²⁴

In Ethiopia, in the famine of the mid-1980s, CA confronted the implications of an expanded mandate. Moreover, its involvement spanned the re-working of North-South relations outlined above. That is, from a cold war system based upon nation-state sovereignty to an emerging balance of power characterised by the enhanced role of NGOs, in which such things as the principle of non-interference, especially in relation to humanitarian aid, was less firmly supported. In order to look at the evolving capabilities of CA this thesis looks beyond the organisation as an entity unto itself, to address its broader institutional and policy environment. It gives careful consideration to how this environment has impacted on CA and how CA has positioned itself within a changing world order. In the Ethiopian famines of the 1970s and 1980s in particular, the thesis looks at how CA defined its role within the international community and the broader policy environment.

²² African Rights, *Humanitarianism Unbound?*, p. 10

²³ *ibid.*, p. 36

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 6

2. Institutionalising Memory

This study looks at CA from the beginning of the 1960s through major famines and through a process by which NGOs have grown from small apolitical organisations to prominent political players, both in the southern countries where they work, and in northern countries where they undertake publicity, lobby and advocacy. With changing priorities and demands on aid, practical experience, on its own, has not been enough to ensure a coherent institutional response. There is a significant danger that agencies like CA have not had time to reflect on what has happened. This thesis intends to provide an institutional memory, a reflection on CA's own development. Such an endeavour corresponds to a feeling of internal despair and cynicism within CA; a malaise about CA's past and its future, about its ability to fashion change instead of respond to change, and about its ability to find its voice. Such despair is not limited to CA. A recent survey of a number of British aid agencies, including CA, found a general lack of confidence not only in aid but more widely in the agencies' own involvement in development.²⁵ The malaise was not identified as one of competence (it was recognised that there was always room to improve on that) but of belief in what the agencies themselves were doing.

In general, three main areas of concern within CA can be identified. Firstly, that development education and advocacy have not gone far enough and that the general public's knowledge-base around development issues has remained extremely low. While CA as an organisation has moved forward in its own perceptions of development, there was a general feeling that the charity has failed to take its donors and the broader public with it. As a result, development priorities have continued to be dictated by short-term notions of charity rather than longer-term commitments to justice.²⁶ Secondly, that CA has not been able to make the transition, heralded in the late 1970s and 1980s, from implementers of aid to 'catalysts', 'trainers', and 'partners'. Development has continued to be top-down and it has proved particularly hard to find

²⁵ Hugh Raven, *Future Imperfect: policy strategist report to the British Overseas Aid Group (BOAG, 1997)*

²⁶ ERD.6, Paul Renshaw; & CA.5, Sarah Hughes

ways to make alliances with a life outside the financial relationship.²⁷ Thirdly, the failure to de-link official development assistance from commercial and political interests and a recognition that the agenda was increasingly set by official donors has raised the spectre that aid was simply another form of imperialism and that NGOs like CA were in danger of becoming co-opted, their independence and accountability distorted.²⁸

CA's ability to find a new vision of development to offer its supporters, and a new analysis of its work to enthuse its staff, has depended upon a co-ordinated analysis of experience. Knowing what works, and why, was essential. Knowing what does not work, and why, was almost more important. The inability to learn and remember is an acknowledged and widespread failing of the development community as a whole. For aid agencies like CA it represents a particular dilemma, because there are few reasons to disseminate the positive lessons of development, and many more powerful reasons to conceal the negative ones. Part of the problem had to do with the expectations of supporters, the public and governments. In the 1960s, when much of CA's work was relief-oriented, their advertising messages stressed their ability to reach the poorest quickly, effectively and efficiently. As CA became more involved in development work, in the hope that by tackling the causes the need for relief would be eliminated, the message remained the same. Moreover, as the numbers of northern NGOs expanded in response to continuing emergencies throughout the 1970s and 1980s, competition for funding increased and promises escalated. But development was not a speedy process. CA staff, working with the very poor in marginal areas, knew that effectiveness and efficiency were far less easy to deliver and to measure than, say, infrastructure development or food hand-outs in emergency situations. Development was a qualitative enterprise, it was non-linear; measuring performance and defining 'results' was extraordinarily difficult. Having promised too much to the donor and the public, however, CA was trapped in a vicious circle. If funding was to be maintained or increased, success was essential. With an inbuilt tendency to exaggerate success and downplay failure, important lessons were not learned. Part of the solution to this

²⁷ CA.1, Michael Taylor; ERD.7, Jenny Borden; & FFHC.7, Beverley Jones

²⁸ Raven, *Future Imperfect*

problem has to do with public perception and here the importance of development education is crucial. Much has to do with the development of transparency, accountability and, ultimately, greater credibility - through appropriate types of evaluation, research and the dissemination of findings. This thesis contributes to such evaluation. It provides an institutional history and a tool for institutional learning.

The context for such a history is Ethiopia. Ethiopia in the latter 20th century is the logical place for a first attempt at research about charity. It was the Ethiopian famine in 1984, and the subsequent conception of Band Aid that changed the fund-raising scene in Britain decisively, and with it perceptions of charity. Bob Geldof, with remarkable speed, galvanised the pop and rock industry, raising huge sums of money from a new audience of young people, and commanding the attention of the media. A record of the song, 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' was brought out and became number one in the charts. Six million copies were sold at £1.30, almost all the proceeds going to Band Aid, so that about US\$ 8 million was raised. In July, Live Aid, the 'global jukebox', took place simultaneously in Wembley, London, in front of 70,000 people and in Philadelphia in front of 80,000, and was seen on television via satellite by 1.5 billion people, raising over US\$ 80 million. As Bob Geldof in his parting statement wrote: 'Our idea was to open up the avenues of possibility.'²⁹ Ethiopia's role in defining a generation's perception of the Third World and of development possibilities within that world was paramount. More money was channeled into Ethiopia than to any other disaster.³⁰ Ethiopia is to a large extent responsible for much of the aura, confusion, acclaim, criticism and expectations that surround NGOs. Yet while Ethiopia represents a country intimately connected in the general public's mind with the world of charity, it is not a typical development scenario. Its experience has been at one extreme of the spectrum, dominated by acute famine and one of the longest running wars in Africa. The thesis provides an institutional history of CA in a particular policy environment, one dominated by war and famine.

²⁹ Cited in Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media*, p. 85

³⁰ John Borton, *The Changing role of NGOs in the Provision of Relief and Rehabilitation Assistance: case study 3 - northern Ethiopia and Eritrea* ODI Working Paper 76 (ODI: London, May 1994), p. 27

3. Theory and Interpretation

To analyse the evolving capabilities of CA as a charity, the thesis sets CA in the context of development in general and Ethiopia in particular. It deals with general theories of development as they relate to CA's *raison d'être*, and theories of famine as they relate to CA's specific experience in Ethiopia. All practice contains implicit theory. Theories of development and famine, perhaps only partly-assimilated, and other assumptions strongly influenced how policies and programmes were carried out. Indeed one of the issues that arises in the thesis is that CA had a problem finding a voice; that people within the organisation held different views about development and famine theories and practice. How theory was related into practice is a crucial focus of this study.

The thesis' interpretation draws upon a number of key studies focused around two sets of issues: famine causation; and notions of power. Mark Duffield, in *NGOs, disaster relief and asset transfer in the Horn: political survival in a permanent emergency*³¹ argued that famines could result from the conscious exercise of power in pursuit of gain or advantage by the politically strong and examined the role of donors and NGOs in terms of how they related to the weak and the strong in such a context. He took this further in *The symphony of the damned*³², arguing that humanitarianism as constituted in the 1990s was incapable of analysing power. This had profound implications for the validity of the entire humanitarian undertaking by aid agencies and donors. David Keen in *The Benefits of Famine*³³ examined why famine in Sudan in the mid-1980s should not be considered a policy 'failure', as it reflected the success of powerful groups. Keen highlighted the failures of the international donors to speak up on behalf of those who lacked political influence in their own society. By placing the local effects that famine and relief produced at the centre of his research, he analysed famine and relief as manifestations of power relations. In her study of Burundi refugees

³¹ Duffield, 'NGOs, disaster relief and asset transfer in the Horn', pp. 131-157

³² Mark Duffield, 'The symphony of the damned: racial discourse, complex political emergencies and humanitarian aid' *Disasters*, 20 (1996), pp. 173-93

³³ David Keen, *The Benefits of Famine: a political economy of famine and relief in southwestern Sudan, 1983-89* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1994)

in Tanzania, *Purity and Exile*³⁴, Liisa Malkki, showed how the identification and construction of 'the refugee' had important 'power' and 'control' effects. She analysed the exercise of a 'special philanthropic mode of power'³⁵, identifying key tendencies of institutional behaviour within the humanitarian internationale. Alex de Waal, in *Famine That Kills*³⁶ questioned western conceptions of famine and causation and the implications of this on the appropriateness of relief. In a later study of the link between famine and certain kinds of political institutions, *Social contract and deterring famine: first thoughts*³⁷, De Waal identified a number of politically regressive tendencies in actually existing humanitarianism. James Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine*³⁸ analysed the implementation of a specific development project in Lesotho, showing how the 'development' apparatus acted as an 'anti-politics machine', obscuring political realities and all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of strengthening the state presence in the local region.

All the writers mentioned above have found theories of power useful and have been influenced by the theoretical work of French philosopher Michael Foucault. Foucault's philosophical project involved suspending the attempt to explain historical processes in terms of the motivations of institutions such as the states, or the distribution of power among different classes, and focusing instead on the actual 'power effects' that emerged in a given context.³⁹ By so doing, it became possible to identify new forms of domination and subordination woven into the fabric of the everyday social realm:

'rather than focus on the issue of the motivation or interest of particular groups, classes, or individuals in the exercise of domination ... attention should be

³⁴ Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: violence, memory, and national cosmology among hutu refugees in Tanzania* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1995)

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 296

³⁶ Alex de Waal, *Famine that Kills: Darfur, Sudan, 1984-5* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1989)

³⁷ Alex de Waal, 'Social contract and deterring famine: first thoughts' *Disasters*, 20 (1996), pp. 194-205

³⁸ James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "development," depoliticisation, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1994)

³⁹ Michael Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* (Random House: London, 1961); Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings* (C. Gordon (ed.), Harvester Press: Brighton, 1980)

directed to the processes by which subjects are constituted as effects of power.⁴⁰

Foucault looked for these processes in unusual realms that were not normally considered to be powerful in and of themselves. Specifically, he examined various discourses within the human sciences that served to construct the social world as a rationalisable, and hence programmable system. In his analysis of prisons and asylums, Foucault explored how discourse established scientific 'knowledge' and targets of interventions for institutional practices.⁴¹ In this way, power and control were elaborated.

Influenced by the writers mentioned above, this study also seeks to follow Foucault by exploring in detail the exercise of power that emerged in the context of CA's relief and development interventions. The aim is to understand how development worked in practice and to identify and explain some of the tendencies of institutional behaviour within the development apparatus. One of the issues that emerges is that the driving force behind much of CA's development and emergency policy in Ethiopia was a set of powerful discourses and widely perceived images of change. The thesis analyses how 'the problem' and 'solution' were framed with regard to famine policy in Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s, and development policy in the 1980s/1990s. Foucault's conception of 'discourse' draws attention to the way in which ideas about development and relief embodied relations of power and how they were embedded in particular institutional structures. It is important to note here that Foucault did not believe that discourse was ideological, in the sense that it masked a truer perception of reality. Rather, he believed that discourses were distinct orders of reality in and of themselves, because they produced real power effects in the social domain. Instead of ignoring the lexicon and statements produced by the development apparatus on the grounds that they were ideological, this study takes such words and statements as its point of departure for an exploration of the way in which development initiatives are

⁴⁰ B. Smart, *Foucault, Marxism, and Critique* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: Wiltshire, 1983) cited in Barbara Hendrie, 'Knowledge and power: a critique of an international relief operation' *Disasters*, 21 (1997), p. 59

⁴¹ Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*

produced and put into practice.

The thesis is about understanding development. In this respect it investigates how specific ideas about 'development' are generated, and how they are put to use; and a demonstration of what they end up doing, of what effects they end up producing. Foucault re-emerges throughout as an analytical tool to explain the relationship between theory and practice; to explain why theoretically, structurally and strategically, it was often more convenient for CA to promote emergency and development policy that had more to do with a specific cultural policy paradigm of 'outsiders' and little to do with the specific historical and socio-political context of those who were actually suffering, the 'insiders'. The thesis looks at CA's evolving capabilities in overcoming such flaws. This leaves unanswered many questions about the 'development' value and its origin, but it may perhaps given an indication of why it is necessary to question such a value in the first place.

The major point of departure that this study offers is in adopting a large time frame and historical analysis. A number of popular myths about NGOs and development have their origins in attempts to infer process from form; that is, to make assumptions about the history of a given initiative on the basis of a 'snapshot' view of its current state. There has been a tendency in much of the debate about development for theories and paradigms - the general assumptions made about the subject matter - to be used in isolation of the particular field of activity under study. This thesis demonstrates the importance of using an historical framework to study processes of institutional and theoretical evolution. Attention to historical detail provides a better understanding of various fundamental aspects of NGOs' priorities, performance and relationships with other forces in the development process.

4. Method and Sources

This thesis is the first comprehensive historical study of CA. There have been numerous and discrete agency programme evaluations and a recent publication by Michael Taylor, CA's current Director, on how churches and church organisations

around the world have tried to respond to the challenge of development⁴², but no attempt to analyse the specific history and capabilities of CA. Most of the information on which this thesis is based comes from primary material located in the Christian Aid archives. These are divided between the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies and CA's London office. The archives contain the fullest record of the organisation's activity in Ethiopia, including extensive files on decision-making, correspondence, policy inception and execution, administration, fund-raising, project selection and project implementation. The archives also contain more general records of CA's management, policy and publicity. In addition the archives contain much grey literature - field reports and project assessments - often commissioned and written independently of the organisation.

The method used in the analysis of primary material was open-ended. Information was contextualised by analysing the chains of command within CA and the broader institutional environment. Given the extensive nature of the sources, it was possible to compare the concerns that informed specific projects in Ethiopia with those that were important to CA's overall mandate; to investigate how needs and demands generated from the ground related to and impacted on policy statements' at the directorate level. By linking files on projects in Ethiopia, to files on publicity, the directorate, the European Community and Overseas Development Administration, and the World Council of Churches, it has been possible to piece together a picture of how CA's development and relief agenda has been informed and where 'accountability' has lain; with the partners in the South, with the ecumenical movement or with the public and official donors in the North.

Information also came from oral sources. In England, interviews were conducted over a 2 year period with CA staff, both past and present. Interviewees were targeted and questioned according to information gained from archival research. In Ethiopia, field research was conducted between December 1995 and July 1996. This comprised visits to development sites and numerous interviews with individuals

⁴² Michael Taylor, *Not Angels but Agencies: the ecumenical response to poverty - a primer* (SCM Press: London, 1996)

associated with CA's partner organisations and supported programmes: Ethiopian NGO workers, Western NGO workers, government officials, academics, local officials, farmers and women's groups. The basic methodology pursued was that of open-ended and semi-structured interviewing, and documentary collection and analysis. The types of questions pursued in interviews were largely formed through a process of documentary analysis and discussion with various actors. Where possible, repeat interviews were conducted. Evidence gained from the Ethiopian 'grassroots', was usefully treated as a 'control' on other kinds of evidence, rather than as itself a 'source' for hard information. Within the framework of examining the operation of CA in Ethiopia and Eritrea, while not exhaustive, the case studies were chosen to illustrate the range of CA's activities, operating conditions and policy environment. For example, CA's response and ability to cope with famine in the 1970s and 1980s, and its ability to respond to the development challenges of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The approach throughout was qualitative rather than quantitative.

Inevitably there were methodological problems connected with the type of research undertaken. Firstly, the research project was limited. It was confined to an analysis of CA within a specific policy environment, that of Ethiopia and yet many of the management and publicity issues confronting CA, as an institution, originated outside that particular environment. As a response to this problem, chapters 1 and 2 of the thesis have a more general focus, charting CA's evolution within a broad institutional and theoretical policy environment. In chapters 2 to 6, the focus shifts to CA's position within the specific policy environment of Ethiopia. Secondly, any research on development falls prey to core-periphery structures of power and knowledge. Despite aspirations of 'new professionalism', of reversing the values and roles of 'normal professionalism'⁴³, the power relations which operate at interfaces between inhabitants of local African environments and development researchers have proved persistent. This researcher found a bewildering readiness to internalise

⁴³ For explanation of 'normal' and 'new' professionalism see Robert Chambers, *Challenging the Professions: frontiers for rural development* (Intermediate Technology Publications: London, 1994), pp. 1-14

development lexicon and confirm outsider's agendas. Such confirmation may have arisen out of fear, suspicion, or a desire to remain on good terms by accepting what had been offered, as well as the relations of authority and the memory of past experience which structure such interactions. Thirdly, there are problems with the terminology typically used in development. Words, like 'participation', 'empowerment', 'civil society', 'women in development', are frequently invoked but rarely theorised. Meanings and intentions are too easily obscured and hidden behind rhetoric. This thesis attempts to deal with the weakness of words used in the development lexicon by exploring the links between the discursive and the non-discursive; between the words, the practices and the institutional expression of development. By analysing the power relations that underlie the terminology, it aims to contextualise the language, to explain why it is used and what it means. Finally, the thesis is weighted towards an analysis of famine. A result of studying the specific policy environment of Ethiopia, it leaves itself open to debate about whether such a case study is appropriate to an analysis of CA's evolving capabilities as a charity. Recent scholarship has tended to de-isolate famines from 'normal' times and has shown that local historical, political and economic processes transcend what is perceived by outsiders as a sudden 'disaster event'.⁴⁴ Further it is argued that many of the concerns and issues - structural and conceptual - surrounding 'relief' are identical to those surrounding 'development' and that, for local people, relief and development represent a continuum around which varying strategies are organised. In this respect, it is hoped that this study's analysis of Ethiopia will have some wider relevance to an understanding of charity in other locations.

5. Chapter Outline

Structured chronologically, the thesis explores the evolution of CA's capabilities, as a charity in Ethiopia over three decades. The thesis is arranged in six chapters.

⁴⁴ De Waal, *Famine that Kills*; Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*; Amrita Rangasami, "'Failure of exchange entitlements" theory of famine: a response' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20 (12 October 1985), pp. 1747-1752 & (19 October 1985), pp. 1797-1801

Chapter 1 looks at CA as an organisation, at its evolution and positioning within the world of relief and development. One issue that emerges in particular is the problem CA has faced in finding a voice, a clear articulation of the charity's goals and strategy. It highlights the different levels of policy and concern within the agency and the need to approach it both as a single entity, an organisation with an official voice, and as a community of individuals, an organisation with many voices. Exploring the origins, motivations and structures encompassed within CA, the chapter looks at how the agency has turned intentions into action, how it has coped with conflicting interests, and how it has made choices and compromises. It looks at how CA has related to its donors and supporters in the North and its partners and beneficiaries in the South. The aim is to understand how CA works by investigating the complex set of social, cultural, historical and financial interests located within it.

Chapter 2 looks at the relevance of theories of famine, relief and sustainable development to CA's experience. It explores the various paradigm shifts in development policy over the past 30 years and their implication for how NGOs, like CA, have positioned themselves. One issue that emerges is how theories of famine, relief and development have produced a number of local power effects. Drawing on Foucault as a tool of analysis the chapter explores how in the context of relief and development, power is exercised. It explores the links between the discursive construction of 'famine', and 'poverty' and the institutional practices that are subsequently prioritised. The chapter examines the implication of such links on charities like CA. By analysing how theories of development are generated, the chapter explores not just theory but the structure of international relations and the current economic order. This chapter is a prelude to an analysis of CA's performance in Ethiopia. It sets up debates that had a real meaning for CA around a set of policy concerns in Ethiopia; debates about how to define its position within the economic and political world order vis-à-vis its donors, the host state, the media, its beneficiaries and its partners.

Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 look specifically at CA's performance in Ethiopia. Chapter 3 examines CA's experience of famine in Ethiopia in the mid-1970s and the nature of its response. By looking at the concrete local effects of famine and relief, a

critique of the operation is put forward. In particular, the chapter looks at how CA positioned itself within theories of famine and disaster relief. The purpose of the analysis is not to provide a simple time-specific evaluation but to highlight CA's capabilities in the mid-1970s, to explore what the experience meant for CA, what the lessons were, and whether lessons were institutionalised. In 1984, famine returned to Ethiopia. Chapters 4 and 5 look at CA's ability to deal with the challenge. They look at the evolution and positioning of CA's mandate; at how the experiences of the past informed the present; and at how both influenced the framework for the future. Chapter 4 focuses on the local and international environment. It looks again at the relevance of theories of famine to NGOs, like CA, and at how policy concerns were conceived. Chapter 5 turns directly to CA's experience through its involvement in the Emergency Relief Desk. This Desk channeled aid, illegally, into rebel-held territories of northern Ethiopia and represented a radically different theorisation of famine. The chapter explores the alternative framework for action presented by the Desk and what this meant for CA. In particular the implications for the positioning of CA's relief and development mandate is examined. Together, chapters 4 and 5 provide a critique of conventional models of assistance. But they also highlight the structural and ideological constraints that continued to determine how 'relief' and 'development' worked in practice. The chapters raise profound questions for CA, that go to the root of what it is, what it does and who it answers to.

In chapter 6, the analysis moves away from famine and focuses on how CA articulated development policies in the late 1980s and 1990s. The chapter looks at the relevance of theories of development to CA at this time. It explores the conceptualisation, planning, and implementation of one rural development programme, the Freedom From Hunger Campaign, in southern Ethiopia, supported from its inception by CA. The chapter uses Foucault as a tool of analysis, looking at the links between the development discourses of the time and the institutional practices that emerged. Exploring the hidden and discrete functions of such discourses, the chapter shows how the programme, designed and implemented as an 'alternative', 'bottom-up' development strategy, in reality became a conventional, top-down development

programme. By analysing how power was elaborated in development, the analysis questions whether CA was institutionally equipped to respond to challenges for 'alternative development'. It suggests that despite the shifts in the institutional language of development, the set of power relations which underlie the development process have reflected a greater degree of continuity and persistence.

For CA as for other charities, the journey from the optimistic 1960s to the reality of the century's last years has been one fraught with painful but important lessons; lessons about poverty, community and change, about failure, growth and achievement. The concluding chapter looks at what lessons have been learned. It revisits the relationship between the discursive and the non-discursive and the problems CA has faced. It concludes by asking whether a history of this kind can contribute anything in policy terms, and makes suggestions as to what such contributions might be.

Chapter 1

THE INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN AID: A PROCESS OF ADAPTATION

This chapter indicates the broad character and capabilities of CA over 50 years as a basis for analysis of its actions in Ethiopia. One issue that emerges in particular are the different levels of policy and concern within CA. For this reason, it will be necessary at times to present CA as an organisation while at others, to turn to its internal and sometimes divisive dynamics. The aim of the chapter is to understand how CA works by investigating the complex set of social, cultural, historical and financial interests located within it. Attention will be paid to the link between theory and practice and the process by which concerns are implemented.

1. The Origins of Christian Aid 1945 to c. 1960

CA embodied the traditions, preconceptions, concerns and circumstances of its origins. This section looks at their relevance. Formally dated from September 1945 as the official relief and development agency of the British Council of Churches, CA's formation lay within a broader process, the development of an 'ecumenical' movement, started in 1922 and only formally inaugurated in 1948. There are a number of key dates.

In 1922 the European Bureau for Inter-Church Aid was set up by the Swiss Protestant Church and the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. Its aim was to resettle and secure the nationality of the large numbers of stateless persons following the First World War.¹ By 1945, with the end of the Second World War, the Bureau became involved in more general works of relief and rehabilitation throughout Europe. It was joined in this work by the Christian Reconstruction in Europe Committee, an organisation created by the Protestant Churches of Britain and Ireland. The Committee represented the 'service' arm of the British Council of Churches, which had been created 3 years earlier in 1942, by the same churches. It was the

¹ Between 1933 and 1939 the Bureau also became involved internationally in helping the Jews fleeing from Hitler and Nazi persecution.

forerunner of CA. In 1945 the Committee launched a Million Pound Fund Appeal in Great Britain. Its target was reached by 1949, achieved partly through VE-Day Collections in churches and partly by a diocesan quota system both in the Church of England and in other denominations. The funds raised were used for refugees and the needs of the European churches, particularly in Germany and were distributed through the World Council of Churches. While not yet inaugurated the World Council was in 'process of formation', having a small office in Geneva and from 1945 an office in London. The World Council was officially inaugurated in 1948 at its first assembly held in Amsterdam with representatives from churches worldwide. At the assembly, it was decided that the World Council needed a service arm, to provide for the hungry and the refugees. The Department of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees² was created, replacing the Bureau. One year later, the British Council of Churches changed the name of its service arm, and the Committee became the Department of Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service. The department was a related agency of the World Council's department, seeking to raise funds for its project list, but remained entirely autonomous. Both were primarily concerned with refugees and other aid programmes in Europe. It was at the World Council's second assembly at Evanston, USA in 1954, that their mandates were extended to include aid programmes throughout the world. This expansion necessitated vast increases in resources and in 1957, the British Department of Inter-Church Aid introduced its first fund-raising 'Christian Aid Week'. Two hundred towns and villages took part and £26,000 was raised. Christian Aid Week became established as an annual event and in 1964, the name of the Department changed for the second time and became 'Christian Aid'.

CA was thus created within an ecumenical family as part of an ecumenical response to poverty. Such a response aimed to overcome divisions: to unite a divided church and to do so in the task of raising the living standard of the under-privileged,

² The Department of Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service went through a number of name changes, in 1960 becoming the Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, in 1971 the Committee of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service and in 1992 Unit IV. For clarity, this study shall refer to it as the Department of Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service throughout.

making one a divided world.³ It involved a commitment to the poor, free from the evangelical strings of the traditional missionary structures of the Church. The response was operationalised through the members of the family. These were divided into three main groups. Firstly, there were the so-called agencies, of which CA was one. These were agencies of churches in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. They were usually ecumenical in character; in other words, they acted for more than one church and in close co-operation with the World Council. Initially they raised money from their churches alone but this soon extended to include governments and the general public. As the main source of funds for the ecumenical response to poverty, these agencies were often referred to as 'donor agencies'. The second group was made up of councils of churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Middle East.⁴ Most of them were national councils, although there were a few regional councils. Many of the national councils had originally been 'missionary councils' but with independence became representative of the indigenous churches. Their agendas included a range of Christian work and witness, and also development. The third members were found within the World Council and in particular within its many and varied departments specifically set up to respond to poverty. The ecumenical response to poverty was particularly identified with the Department of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees. From 1956, this published a 'project list', a register of defined pieces of work with budgets or price-tags attached. Such projects were screened and recommended by the national councils in the South and approved and listed for funding by the World Council. The agencies in the North, such as CA, would then pick and choose among them.

How CA worked was to a large extent defined by its origins within this ecumenical movement. It was a non-operational charity; it did not employ its own staff on overseas station (unless requested to find and sponsor an individual/individuals) but operated through partner organisations, staffed and managed by local people. Its

³ For a more general analysis of the ecumenical response to poverty see Taylor, *Not Angels but Agencies*, pp. 1-20

⁴ Today, councils of churches number well over 70 worldwide

'natural' partners were the overseas churches and councils of churches. As the development agency of the over 40 British and Irish member churches of the British Council of Churches, much of CA's income came directly from the churches or through efforts of church members. The main fund-raising activity was concentrated on two annual campaigns - the Christmas Appeal which operated through CA subscribers and the churches; and Christian Aid Week, in May, when the Church went to the world locally and nationally to tell people about need and ask for support. The first Christian Aid Week in 1957 was organised by local councils of churches who ran a week of events and door-to-door collections. Following this, Christian Aid committees were formed to operate in conjunction with the local councils of churches. Where no such councils existed, special inter-denominational committees sprang up. Unlike secular agencies, such as Oxfam, which had to create an active volunteer base, CA was able to draw on a countrywide cadre of church workers who could be mobilized through such committees.

While the structure and ideology of CA reflected the specific history and characteristics of an ecumenical movement, the movement was not itself isolated. Indeed it was very much part of a broader ideological setting, one carried forward by people whose outlook had been strongly influenced by the ideals of international understanding to which the carnage of the two World Wars had given birth. The 'internationalist' ideology to which they all subscribed had launched the League of Nations, the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions and in the post-World War II period led to the establishment and mushrooming of voluntary development agencies. The vision they all shared was of a fairer world, free from poverty. Such visions were not of course new, injustice and poverty were far older than the war, but there was a fresh determination to deal with them and high hopes that they could be overcome.

This internationalist ideology was firmly shaped by economic theories and development strategies influential at the time. Framed within a modernist paradigm, development was constructed as a relatively linear process, a function of capital

investment and the adoption of Northern values and technologies.⁵ The mode of operating was essentially project based, with goods or services being delivered. In a review of development theory literature, Esman and Uphoff commented:

'... the development thinking of the 1950s was largely influenced by technological concerns. A "technology gap" was identified between the advanced and backward nations, to be filled by the transfer of technology to the latter. ...The various "resource gaps" ... were to be filled by transfer of resources from richer to poorer nations - in sufficient amounts, it was hoped, for "take off" into self-sustained economic growth.'⁶

Emphasis was placed on capital transfers, formal planning, specialisation, central government control with a top-down development approach, the centre dominating the periphery, etc. This was a 'production-centered' approach to economic and social development. Development education and policy advocacy, in as far as they existed, served solely to bring in the necessary funds.

Despite its own individual message, the Church's involvement in development which came through the ecumenical movement, followed or at least echoed such theories and prescriptions. Within the ecumenical response, development was oriented towards project implementation and the transfer of aid. A great deal of faith was put in the spread of technology, industry and economic growth rather than charity as the key to justice and an end to the worst of poverty. The second assembly of the World Council at Evanston in 1954 was full of praise for economic and technical aid, describing 'the response of more developed countries through expanded international programmes of technical assistance' as 'one of the brightest pages of recent history.'⁷ A similar faith was evident in several reports of the Council's assembly in New Delhi in 1961: 'Technological development promises liberation from hunger, disease and misery'; 'in the specific field of economic development, we welcome the vigorous

⁵ For a general explanation of development theory and its evolution see Milton J. Esman & Norman T. Uphoff, *Local Organisations: intermediaries in rural development* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York, 1984), pp. 42-57; David C. Korten, 'Third generation NGO strategies: a key to people-centred development' *World Development*, 15 Supplement (1987), pp. 145-59

⁶ Esman & Uphoff, *Local Organisations*, p. 49

⁷ Extract taken from report of the World Council of Churches assembly at Evanston in 1954 cited in Taylor, *Not Angels but Agencies*, pp. 62-63

effort to increase production and raise living standards.’⁸ Moreover, by the end of the 1960s, the refrain had not changed: ‘the developing countries must achieve a much more rapid rate of growth.’⁹ In this respect, the ecumenical movement, and therefore CA, followed the economic and ideological fashions of development dictated by the secular world.

CA’s origins were thus shaped by a broad theoretical setting and by specific ecumenical structures. It is in such origins that the contours of future tensions and ambiguities within CA can be identified. The main problem revolved around the conflict of a specialised development agency operating within an ecumenical family. From the beginning, there was a basic contradiction within CA’s mandate. CA was at once an agency created formally to meet immediate human need and to help poor communities overcome material poverty and at the same time a member of an ecumenical family committed to a more holistic response to poverty that included Christian education and even evangelism. CA was part of a broad ecumenical movement but with a purely ‘developmental’ mandate. This created tensions in its external relations with the World Council and with its ecumenical partners in the South, the churches and councils of churches, who often wanted a more ‘holistic’ or rounded response to their needs.¹⁰ It also created tensions internally about strategy; between a commitment to ecumenism and its manifestation as partnership with councils of churches, and a commitment to efficiency and a realisation that the councils were not necessarily capable development partners.

The problem of efficiency became more crucial as CA’s mandate expanded beyond Europe to include refugees from Palestine, Korea and China following the eruption of conflicts throughout the world in the 1950s and to Africa, following the challenges of independence and nation-building. By the end of the 1950s, CA’s annual

⁸ Extract from report of the World Council of Churches assembly in new Delhi in 1961 cited in *ibid.*, p. 63

⁹ Extract from a conference in Beirut in 1968, organised by the World Council of Churches cited in *ibid.*, p. 64

¹⁰ Holism means combining service (development) with witness and mission.

income had risen from £29,000 at the beginning of the decade to £483,000.¹¹ Where and how this money was spent was to become a matter of increasing concern. Initially, the contradiction between efficiency and ecumenism was resolved through the strategy of institution-building. The northern churches and agencies shaped the councils of churches into useful development partners, into organisations through which projects could be assessed and aid channeled. However this, in turn, threw up new problems about partnership within an ecumenical family. In effect, the councils were being turned into instruments of the North, equipped to do what the North required. In the process, they were diverted from their traditional holistic tasks to more specialised 'development' tasks.

The debate about whether mission and development should be kept apart or held together, a heritage of its ecumenical history, was to prove a defining feature of CA's history, manifesting itself in internal divisions about strategy. But the charity's ambiguous position with regard to the 'mission' and 'development' components of the ecumenical movement also impacted externally on its public identity. While Inter-Church Aid had represented a desire by the Northern Churches and their supporters for a different approach, distinct from the divisive denominational approach of the missions and their association with colonialism, the title Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service, and then Christian Aid implied that the money raised was confined to one church helping another. It was not understood by many that aid was given regardless of religion. Doubts about the nature of CA's 'Christian' identity were to prevail throughout its history and for many staff within CA, anxious to promote a more secular and developmental message of their work, remained a major concern.

The contours of a second major problem existed in the prevalent modernist paradigm for development and its expression through the funding of projects. Institutionalised through the World Council's project list and the councils of churches, it was to prove a key feature of the ecumenical response to poverty. As the theory that underpinned such an approach came under re-examination in the late 1960s, the

¹¹ CA News, 'Christian Aid From 1944 to 1990' (CA: London, March 1990)

question emerged as to whether CA (or indeed the World Council) would be able to negotiate an alternative development role, despite these structural origins.

The ambiguities of structure and discourse highlighted above went to the heart of the issue of capability, touching on the limitations and possibilities of CA's role. Most importantly, they reveal how already by 1960, CA was made up of many voices and represented different interests. The following section looks at the growth of CA and the evolution of its mandate. In particular, it explores how these different voices and interests were accommodated.

2. The Evolution of Christian Aid, 1960-90

Between 1959 and 1990, CA expanded and was significantly transformed: its annual income increased from £483,000 in 1959, to £31,248,115 in 1989/90¹²; its restricted relief mandate extended to encompass development, human rights, publicity, lobby and advocacy; and its operational environment changed from the limited and well-defined apolitical framework of the Cold War to the complex shifting international setting of the 'new world order'. Four main stages are identified in this evolution, each reflecting CA's evolving capabilities: 1960 to the early 1970s, a time during which CA's mandate was transformed and CA became engaged in a social justice debate; the watershed years of the mid-1970s when CA was riven with internal divisions over theory and practice; the 1980s with debates about how CA should move forward and what its beliefs were; and 1987, the year of new commitments and new confidence. Within this periodisation, five key themes re-emerge and provide a discrete ordering: development strategy; fund-raising; education; partners; and relations with states.

2.1 *A development mandate & the social justice debate 1960-73*

In 1960, CA was a charitable relief organisation focused primarily on meeting immediate needs through the financing of direct action - distribution of food and the

¹² CA financial statements and reports (1951-84), (SOAS.CA/J/1)

provision of shelter. Over the next 10 years, as CA became involved in non-disaster situations and in the challenges of independence and nation-state building in Africa, concerns about addressing the longer-term 'development' problems that underlay poverty and the disasters it created were expressed. Over the same time, CA had begun to weaken its links with the World Council and expand into new partnerships. The operational and institutional environment that had given CA a clear and limited role in the 1950s had changed. By the early 1970s, Hugh Samson, CA's public relations adviser, argued that 'CA ... [was] confronted with a wide variety of choices as an anti-poverty movement and as an ecumenical instrument for development.'¹³

The quantitative picture tells part of the story. What had begun in the late 1950s as a few area secretaries, largely concerned with servicing Christian Aid Week committees, was by the end of the 1960s a network of full-time staff covering England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. These staff became the representatives of CA in all sectors of their local communities, performing the role of fund-raisers and educators. The London head office had also grown, occasioning a move to larger offices in 1968 and CA's annual income had risen from £483,000 in 1959 to £3,121,713 in 1973.¹⁴ The other half of the story lies in the fundamental change in CA's mandate. At the outset, its message, transferred from a northern setting to a southern one, had primarily been one of 'compassion' and 'concern' and its role, as meeting the special needs imposed on people by war, political tension and natural disasters. In the 1960s, Hugh Samson, stated that this role came 'to include remedial measures against the basic economic causes of poverty.'¹⁵ Charity and relief were replaced by a strategic commitment to address development and justice.

Such a challenge, to move away from paternalistic programmes of charity to address the real causes of poverty, reflected the concerns of communities and countries in the South as they emerged from their colonial history. Within the ecumenical family, such concerns were made particularly evident in the statements of the All Africa Council

¹³ Hugh Samson, 'A re-appraisal of CA's role' (August 1974), (SOAS.CA2/D/15.1)

¹⁴ CA financial statements and reports (1951-84), (SOAS.CA/J/1)

¹⁵ Hugh Samson, 'A re-appraisal of CA's role' (August 1974), (SOAS.CA2/D/15.1)

of Churches. This council had emerged out of an ad hoc meeting of churches in 1958 to 'discern more fully the role of the Church in present day Africa.'¹⁶ The churches agreed to remain united and in 1963 the council was formally inaugurated in Kampala, Uganda. The purpose of the council was to respond to the new responsibilities of independence. In this respect it aimed to forge a new relationship between the churches in Africa and the World Council of Churches; one of fellowship, 'no longer of Teacher and pupil'¹⁷; one of unity, not of denominational rivalry; and through such partnership to promote development. The council glimpsed the 'possibility of a renewed Church, awakened to the concern for the needs of men, women, and the youth, in a new Africa.'¹⁸ The western churches and missions were challenged to respond with a post-colonial form of developmental and ecumenical cooperation.

At the same time, calls for a new development commitment were being echoed in the North. The United Nations led the way by announcing that the 1960s would be the 'decade of development'. Guided by its northern and southern constituency, CA began to branch out from immediate relief of need towards a more diversified set of commitments. A shift towards long-term development, with an emphasis on more integrated development projects and programmes as well as appropriate technology occurred. An important channel for such action was provided by the Freedom From Hunger Campaign launched by Dr. B. R. Sen, then the Director of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation. It was a programme directed not against famine and its immediate relief, but against the causes of permanent insufficiency of food supplies and its long-term alleviation. Moreover its design was for self-generated agricultural development; it relied on national committees set up in countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America as well as in the West; and it placed as much importance on education as on fund-raising. From 1961, CA used the programme as a channel

¹⁶ All Africa Council of Churches, 'Basis of co-operation with the World Council of Churches concerning the Special Agency for the Emergency Programme' (November 1965), (SOAS.CA/A/1.2)

¹⁷ Rev'd Gabriel Setiloane, 'Freedom and anarchy in the Church', (Kampala Assembly, 1963), (SOAS.CA/A/8.1)

¹⁸ All Africa Council of Churches, 'Programme on social, economic national and international affairs' (Kampala Assembly, April 1963), (SOAS.CA/A/8.1)

through which to finance agricultural development. In many ways the programme helped CA recast its role to confront the challenge of world poverty to which it had been made so sensitive by its church partners overseas. It also enabled CA to join the development decade as a partner of the United Nations system and to become involved in a network of like-minded voluntary organisations in Britain; Oxfam and War on Want were also closely involved with programme. It has been written that: 'the Freedom From Hunger Campaign profoundly influenced the philosophy and approach of Oxfam and other overseas aid agencies towards the longer-term development objectives of the projects it supported.'¹⁹ The same was true of CA and by the early 1970s, the agency was funding more than 100 long-term development projects in over 40 countries. It had indeed become an 'anti-poverty movement.'²⁰

In a similar vein, in 1965, recognizing the urgent necessity to adopt more comprehensive approaches to emergency situations in Africa, the World Council's Department of Inter-Church Aid, in partnership with the All Africa Council of Churches, launched an appeal for a fund of \$10,000,000 over a period of 5 years. The fund was administered by a Special Agency set up in Africa, the Ecumenical Programme for Emergency Action in Africa. Its purpose was to enable the churches in Africa to respond adequately to emergency situations, especially:

'the acute need arising from man-made emergency situations (such as political refugees) and also the urgent development problems confronting the emerging new nations as they seek to build up their nationhood.'²¹

A comprehensive and integrated 'programme approach' as opposed to a 'project approach' was developed for inter-church aid :

'the adventure of undertaking a planned programme of emergency action over a period of years is a new experiment in the work of inter-church aid. If it succeeds it may have much to teach us concerning effective inter-church aid in tackling a regional situation and influencing its development.'²²

¹⁹ Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, p. 74

²⁰ Hugh Samson, 'A re-appraisal of CA's role' (August 1974), (SOAS.CA2/D/15.1)

²¹ All Africa Council of Churches, 'Basis of co-operation with the World Council of Churches concerning the Special Agency for the Emergency Programme' (November 1965), (SOAS.CA/A/1.2)

²² World Council & All Africa Council of Churches, 'Ecumenical Programme for emergency action in Africa' (1965), (SOAS.CA/A/8.2)

Over the 5 years of its operation, CA gave about £80,000 to this programme.²³

A commitment to such long-term development strategies was accompanied by a recognition and deeper analysis among members of the ecumenical family of the structural causes of poverty and underdevelopment. At the World Council's fourth assembly in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968, the churches were challenged: 'to move beyond the piecemeal and paternalistic programme of charity which have sometimes characterized Christian mission, and ... confront positively the systematic injustice of the world economy.'²⁴ Recognition of the politics of poverty and consequently the need to move beyond treating the symptoms to address the underlying causes became a common refrain within ecumenical circles. The validity of the 'project' approach was under attack. At the Montreux Conference of 1970, it was declared that: 'the debate about development and the churches' involvement in development is still much too oriented towards project implementation and the transfer of aid.'²⁵

By the beginning of the 1970s, the task of the churches and the ecumenical movement had been significantly recast. A previous Head of CA's Aid Sector defined such a role as one of 'participation with the poor and the oppressed in their struggle for development - through the promotion of justice, self-reliance and economic growth.'²⁶ In 1968, the Director of CA had already talked about a 'certain change in perspective about what we are doing.'²⁷ He argued that 'the popular image of us is still largely in the shape of the old relief charity organization' and that, 'overall I do want the churches and I suppose the general public, as quickly as possible, to see CA as the total response to world need.'²⁸ Concepts of justice, partnership and a commitment to structural change appeared in CA's literature about its motivation and reasoning. These changes, in the size of its operations and the remit of its mandate, had profound implications for CA. By opening up new possibilities, they exposed the different voices within the

²³ CA financial statements and reports (1951-84), (SOAS.CA/J/1)

²⁴ Cited in Taylor, *Not Angels but Agencies*, p. 49

²⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 49

²⁶ Paul Spray, 'CA's role in inter-church aid' (26 October, 1988), (CAO.DIR 208)

²⁷ Rev'd Alan Brash, memo to Hugh Samson (19 June 1968), (SOAS.CA/I/15.2)

²⁸ *ibid.*

organisation, the different concerns, interests, motivations, goals and agendas.

Tensions and ambiguities merged around three key issues. These issues went to the core of what CA meant to different people.

The first involved how CA related to people in industrialised countries, through fund-raising and development education. Early on, Janet Lacey, CA's first Director (1952-68), had been sensitive about the use of images and their impact on perceptions of the South. She expressed doubts about the emotions aroused by,

'pictures of children with swollen bellies. It is that emotion that compels devoted members of voluntary organizations and churches to raise money to send to these unknown personalities behind the photos. Yet it is these very photos that offend the peoples of the hungry world. They see them as an insult to their dignity.'²⁹

Moreover as a member of a worldwide ecumenical family, committed to unity and equality within that family, such portrayals would be quickly challenged as contradictory and unacceptable. At its inaugural Kampala assembly, the All Africa Council of Churches pushed the point home:

'we would like to draw the attention of the overseas churches and their missionaries to the content and presentation of appeals which they make to the generosity of their constituency. We would ask that they make a special effort to present Africa and the churches of this continent in their reality and their present form rather than dwelling on their folklore in a sentimental and inaccurate fashion.'³⁰

The expanded social justice mandate of the 1960s seemed to resolve such concerns. As Janet Lacey again made clear:

'what is needed is a careful and planned process of educating public opinion and turning the world and our structures slowly but surely up-side down ... reliance on oversimplified propaganda, publicity and other methods of the "charity business" however necessary is not enough ... the effort to feed the hungry without agitation for social justice is a doubtful exercise.'³¹

However, there were strong institutional rationale for the use of negative imagery. Even by 1965, the national situation in which CA operated had changed: 'many more organizations have entered into the refugee and aid field and many more appeals for

²⁹ Janet Lacey, 'The development apocalypse' (Oxford annual conference: the role of the voluntary agency in development, n.d), (SOAS.CA/I/15.4)

³⁰ All Africa Council of Churches, 'The life of the Church' (Kampala Assembly, April 1963), (SOAS.CA/A/8.1)

³¹ Janet Lacey, 'The development apocalypse', (Oxford annual conference: the role of the voluntary agency in development, n.d), (SOAS.CA/I/15.4)

money have been made', such that there is now 'more competition in every facet of the work.'³² As a result, in the same year that Janet Lacey was denouncing the merits of 'disaster pornography', she was receiving arguments of a different kind from CA's public relations adviser:

'in the future when money is going to be tight we've got to hit harder in our press advertising. The gentler, symbolic approach adopted these last two years will achieve less with people who are beginning to clutch their purses and count their pennies. I think we've got to employ the direct statement, expressed tersely and illustrated graphically... I need pictures of real impact.'³³

This contradiction between what CA wanted to do and what it was able to do was still recognisable in the 1990s. The problem, then as now, was significantly contributed to by independent media coverage. Indeed the integration of television with the dynamics of disaster relief can be said to date from the 1960s. Television increased the potential for the impact of images and hence the competition for them. Further, the images of a 'disaster', an 'event' that it portrayed and the outpouring of compassion aroused by the prospect of tangible relief - a food convoy, a feeding center - that it facilitated increased 'the gap between ... over-simplification in publicity ... and a broader and deeper sense of British responsibility towards World Poverty.'³⁴ In 1963, a significant attempt was made by the major charities to diminish the effects of competition in disaster situations, both in terms of co-ordinating activities but also in terms of preventing opportunistic fund-raising and the exploitation of negative imagery, when the Disasters Emergency Committee was formed. Previous to this, agencies had run their own appeals at disaster times; the argument in favour of competition was that the total amount of money raised by several appeals must be larger than the amount from one single joint one. Television changed things. Commercial advertising for charitable causes was not allowed but the TV authorities were prepared, for a major disaster, to run a peak-time appeal for the victims. They would not run several different appeals or give one charity preferential treatment. It was therefore agreed that the five

³² Notes from CA staff conference (Farnham Castle, 11-16 September 1965), (SOAS.CA/I/15.4)

³³ Hugh Samson, letter to Janet Lacey (5 January 1967), (SOAS.CA/I/15.1)

³⁴ Janet Lacey, *A Cup of Water: the story of Christian Aid* (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 1970), p. 104

main British agencies, the British Red Cross Society, CA, Oxfam, Save the Children Fund and War on Want, would mount a joint Disasters Emergency Committee appeal and split the proceeds.³⁵ However, while the Committee represented an important attempt to combat the negative effects of competitive fund-raising and clearly worked well, disagreements and competition between member agencies remained:

‘individual agencies continue to steal marches on one another, for example in making separate appeals, sending individual representatives to scenes of disaster, slanting their publicity to their own advantage etc.’³⁶

Images, in a competitive environment, provided a tool upon which to capitalise. In this sense they had their own momentum. With increased media coverage from the 1960s, the stakes became higher. This impacted in three ways. Firstly, it amplified the tendency to exploit negative imagery as the best way of tapping into the public’s guilt and compassion and hence purses. Secondly it created a new imperative, to be seen to be doing something even where and when the capability to do so might be lacking. With CA, this was already visible from 1967. In that year, the agency sent a photographer, Margaret Murray, to take photos of Sudanese refugees in western Ethiopia, for whom the World Council of Churches was raising funds. Following reports from the British Embassy in Addis Ababa, Margaret Murray also went to Wollo province, Ethiopia, to look at the famine situation there. It seems that the images she brought back to England created a momentum at head office that proceeded to race ahead of the capabilities on the ground. The Associate Director of CA, B. J. Dudbridge wrote to Christopher King at the World Council: ‘as we seem to have brought the news of this famine, to England, it would seem appropriate that we should do what we can.’³⁷ On the ground, the Rev’d Robert Huddleson thought differently and complained

³⁵ The DEC’s present membership is Christian Aid, the British Red Cross Society, Oxfam, Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, and Save the Children Fund. Help the Aged and Action Aid became associate members in 1986. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the London office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and the British Refugee Council are observer members. The Overseas Development Administration helps with the running cost of the DEC Secretariat. The Committee of London and Scottish Bankers and the Post Office offered facilities for receiving donations from the public which were paid into one central account administered by one of the charities in rotation. Each member charity was allocated an equal share of the appeal proceeds, although this could depend on the extent of each agency’s involvement in the affected country.

³⁶ Evelyn Shuckburgh, letter to Rev’d Alan Booth (10 January 1973), (SOAS.CA2/D/11.6)

³⁷ B. J. Dudbridge, letter to Christopher King (17 March 1967), (SOAS.CA/A/2.2)

to Dudbridge that 'the whole effect is to force us to do something to justify the publicity.'³⁸ In this particular instance, action was not taken but the implications about the impact of images were clearly apparent. Finally, the incentive to capitalise on increased media coverage impacted negatively on CA's ability to educate the public about the real meaning of development. In this respect, the conflict between the demands of short-term fundraising that required the use of 'starving child' images and development education was not simply about strategies but about perceptions of what CA was and where its mission lay.

A survey of CA's goals and objectives undertaken in the early 1970s identified a clear political, social and economic analysis, on its part, of poverty and a critical attitude to international power structures. More so than Oxfam, CA as an organisation was seen to offer a coherent analysis of global structures and a commitment to campaign against injustice.³⁹ It was seen to recognise that the causes of under-development more often lay in the political and economic structures of an unequal world - in trade, commodity prices, debt, land distribution - and in the misguided policies of governments, than in the actions of the poor themselves; that such issues could not be addressed in the micro context of the traditional project; and that lobbying and advocacy were ways in which it could increase its impact and effectiveness.⁴⁰ In 1968 Hugh Samson, CA's public relations adviser advocated that:

'CA, like other overseas aid bodies, has "popularized" the effects of poverty - in personalizing them. What we now have to do is also to popularize the causes of poverty - by humanizing the economic and statistical factors.'⁴¹

However the issue about how much weight to give to education and how much to aid programmes remained crucial. It was an issue that created much debate within the agency, reflecting individuals' perceptions of what kind of an organisation CA was and should become. By choosing to be a 'total response to world need', Hugh Samson expressed concern that the emotional giving and support, triggered by a 'disaster' and a

³⁸ Rev'd R. Huddleson, letter to B. J. Dudbridge (2 May 1967), (SOAS.CA/A/2.2)

³⁹ E. De Clerck, A. Keune & A. Kooke, 'A survey on funding agencies and development education' (Development Research Institute: The Netherlands, June 1972), (SOAS.CA2/D/9.5)

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Hugh Samson, memo to Rev'd Alan Brash (12 November 1968), (SOAS.CA/I/15.2)

relief project, upon which CA as an institution depended for its financial survival would be undermined. He warned that, 'CA's constituency and supporters ... find it increasingly difficult to re-discover the simple logic and clear focus which attracted their allegiance.'⁴² The concern felt by many staff was that by extending its responsibility for education beyond what CA actually did with its money and why, it would go beyond what CA's supporters felt it should be doing.

The dilemma of how to balance fund-raising messages for a public most easily moved by short-term disaster appeals, with a recognition that longer-term development depended on the willingness of that same public to support difficult and costly structural change, was never resolved, and individuals within CA remained divided over how much emphasis CA should give to its project work and its educational work. Ultimately, a way forward was negotiated by an institutional commitment for CA to undertake bolder advocacy and, in those instances where concerns about CA's profile arose, to support other independent efforts. Thus according to a revision of its constitution in 1968, CA was authorised to spend a proportion of its income on educating its supporters and the public on development issues and North/South inequalities. In 1970/71 2.5% CA's expenditure was subsequently spent on development education. Similarly, in 1969 the first edition of *Christian Aid News* was published, a paper with a strong educational function. In the same year CA launched a joint campaign with other overseas charities entitled Action for World Development, with a Manifesto calling for increased development aid from the British government and more favourable trading arrangements with the poorer countries. When in 1970, the Charity Commissioners took issue with the Manifesto, stating that direct calls upon government for policy change were uncharitable, it was decided that an independent non-charitable body, the World Development Movement should be set up that could develop its own campaigning strategies, calling on the agencies for support where appropriate. CA helped fund the Movement. CA, along with Oxfam, also set up the

⁴² Hugh Samson, 'A re-appraisal of CA's role' (August 1974), (SOAS.CA2/D/15.1)

New Internationalist in 1973, an independent campaigning magazine designed to inform on development issues.

The second key area of tension concerned CA's operating mechanisms. The dilemma faced in the 1950s about the capability and efficiency of CA's ecumenical partners in the South was intensified by its commitment to a social justice mission. Further, the growing criticism of the 'project' approach questioned the very validity of the national councils which had been shaped primarily to implement such projects. CA responded during the 1960s, by forging partnerships with other indigenous groups, such as through the Freedom From Hunger Campaign. The fundamental dilemma was not however resolved but in many ways was amplified. It would re-emerge dramatically in the mid-1970s and will be discussed in more depth below.

Finally, the shifts of the 1960s impacted profoundly on CA's relations with states, both at home and overseas. By adopting a mandate committed to social justice, CA could not avoid the political implications of its role. At home, a number of problems both with the state, mediated through the writs of the charity commissioners, and with some of CA's supporters, were consequently experienced. These experiences divided CA staff over how 'political' CA should become.⁴³ A particularly good example of how CA's ability to challenge the established order could be restricted by pressure within its domestic setting was that of the Programme to Combat Racism. This was set up in 1969 by the World Council of Churches to support victims of racial oppression and organisations like the African National Congress in South Africa. Part of the programme was a special fund which made annual grants to such groups. CA distanced itself from the programme from the start. While this decision alienated some of its staff and supporters, who saw it as a betrayal of the very people they believed they were called to stand by, it was no doubt designed to reassure the vast majority of donors that their money remained in safe hands and would not be fostering armed revolution or supporting so-called guerrillas, as well as complying with British charity law, in turn reassuring other staff members and supporters. The Programme to Combat

⁴³ David Smithers files. (CAO.DIR.47-52)

Racism was essentially about the political dimension of the struggle against poverty: the need to match immediate help with attempts to confront causes and bring about structural change. As such it brought to the fore the issue of power and questions about its redistribution. As a charity restricted by charitable law and by the sensitivities of some members of its domestic constituency, along with some of its own staff, CA's social justice mission was clearly not without its conditions. Ultimately, its mission was carried forward by broadening negotiations. In this respect, CA continued to speak out against apartheid and oppression and in support for a number of liberation movements in Africa and Central America. That it continued to be criticised for such advocacy exposed the parameters within which negotiations were made.

CA's expanded role also had implications for its relations with governments abroad, such as South Africa during apartheid. For CA, as a non-operational agency this did not impact on its own staff or institutional presence. What it did impact on was the relationship of its southern partners to their governments. While free from some of the difficulties that agencies such as Oxfam might have faced in terms of direct confrontation, CA had to bear the responsibility that supporting partners in an unfriendly government climate threatened to expose them to further oppression. In particular, advocacy on the behalf of oppressed communities could lead to an increase in violence and not a decrease.

The fact that charity in the sense of relief and development was rarely neutral, that it impacted on internal political relations and the challenge this posed to agencies such as CA was most clearly exposed towards the end of the 1960s in Biafra, Nigeria. The Biafran war of 1967-69 and the humanitarian emergency that accompanied it, was essentially manipulated by governments at home and abroad. Further the story of Biafran relief left an outstanding question. Did the mobilisation of the world's concern for the starving children of Biafra in mid-1969 - a mobilisation in which CA played a part - have the effect of prolonging the war and thereby increasing the suffering? Biafra proved to be a fiery baptism for CA. It exposed the fundamental problem of how CA dealt with the issues of power and politics that underlay the poverty and suffering they

were mandated to relieve. The implications of CA's expanded role and the relationship between non-states and states was to become a major issue and focus of debate by the mid-1970s.

By the end of the 1960s, CA had evolved from a small European relief organisation into a worldwide agency committed to a broad development and social justice mandate. In the process a number of structural and ideological problems had been confronted and a role negotiated. However, the underlying ambiguities within this expanded role and in particular the internal conflicts of interest and concern within CA remained. In the 1970s, many of them came to a head.

2.2 1974-75: the watershed years

The mid-1970s represented a time of profound self-questioning, debate and at times, conflict within CA. As the horrors of famine in the Sahel and Ethiopia exposed the frailty of the development efforts of the 1960s and internal conflicts in Burundi, Chad, Sudan, Uganda, Mozambique and Angola dampened the excitement of nation-building, the euphoria of the 1960s gave way to doubts. CA, along with other agencies, found itself groping for a new role and a new strategy. In the process, the fact that CA had meant different things to different people both within the organisation and outside it, was exposed. At times, the debates that ensued threatened to destroy the organisation. This section explores the nature of the crisis and how CA emerged from it. It focuses on the internal dynamics of the organisation and in particular, on two over-lapping events around which tensions crystallised: an internal staff confrontation over the administration of the aid division; and the appointment of an Aid Advisory Committee to 'review and report to the Board on general aid policies.'⁴⁴

The context for debate in the mid-1970s was an organisation looking to find a way of coping with the changing demands that were being made on it. While CA's mandate had expanded and matured during the 1960s, its operating capabilities had not. As described above, much of CA's aid policy had initially been in the form of a

⁴⁴ Aid Advisory Committee, 'Report' (27 June 1975), (CAO.DIR.A)

response to initiatives from Geneva. Projects were funded primarily through the World Council's project list, although CA also allocated aid through a few major councils of churches with whom it had bilateral relationships. During the late 1960s, as the volume of development funds increased, and the emphasis moved from simple relief operations to more sophisticated schemes of general community development, it proved impossible for the small staff of the World Council's Department of Inter-Church Aid to maintain the kind of evaluation and screening of programmes required. This plus a growing awareness that decisions needed to be made closer to the place where work was to be carried out meant that by the early 1970s, the Department was seen as a central clearing house for information rather than as the central executing and evaluating arbiter. In turn, CA had found it necessary as the funds at its disposal increased to build up its own small aid team and to accept more responsibility in building up and maintaining relations with partners in the South. In 1971 CA set up its own overseas aid department. A weakening of ties with the World Council did not however bring with it an automatic increase in effectiveness or efficiency. In many ways it simply represented a transference of responsibility.

Further, within a few years, the size of CA's operations were such that the policies and procedures inherited unchanged from the past, governing the allocation of funds, the monitoring of projects and the feedback of information both to the board of CA and its constituency were clearly in need of re-organization. Evaluations of completed projects were rare; once committed to a project, the aid department would exercise little further control over its progress; criteria for assistance were not clearly or strictly defined; requests for assistance tended to be considered on their individual merits and by individuals rather than as a planned strategic response; and the onus was on the sponsor to present projects rather than on the aid department to seek out areas of greatest need. A review of CA's management in 1972 stated that while:

'rapid growth has been one of the main factors shaping the organisation of CA ... the tendency has been to react to new situations instead of anticipating them

... the state has now been reached at which the management must consider whether the organisation is equipped to cope with further expansion.'⁴⁵

By 1974 the need for a firmer administrative structure and clearer policy guidelines was according to the then Director, the Rev'd Alan Booth, 'everybody's intention.'⁴⁶ On 25th April 1974, an Aid Advisory Committee under the chairmanship of Sir George Sinclair was subsequently set up by the board of CA. It represented:

'an attempt to define the proper general policies for the allocation of funds, together with proposals about the type of machinery and the structure of staff needed to implement them.'⁴⁷

The Committee represented the first strategic attempt by CA to clarify what it was and to define its role. The report was not however produced until June 1975, by which time CA's aid department had come under scrutiny from a different quarter and issues about its strategy had been debated in a less formal and consensual atmosphere.

In September 1974, CA's Deputy Director and Aid Administrator, David Smithers resigned. What ensued in many ways took on the aspect of a personal vendetta by David Smithers against CA and is not relevant here. What is of relevance is that the event exposed and in turn stimulated debates within CA about its efficiency, effectiveness and accountability as an agency in general and of its aid department in particular. What emerged was a period of intense internal questioning about CA's mandate and purpose. David Smithers' initial grievances were directed against two incidents of administrative slackness in the aid administration in which the arrival of emergency funds had been delayed; and against a more general but fundamental aspect of CA's working, its partnership with national councils of churches and churches overseas. Administrative delay had occurred both in the dispatch of a grant of £4,000 to a refugee camp for Malien Tuareg on the outskirts of Niamey over 6 weeks during Christmas 1973 and over the dispatch of a grant of £10,000 for a food-for-work programme for destitute nomads in Wollo province, Ethiopia, between September and November 1973. In the first instance, CA admitted administrative delay on its part but

⁴⁵ L. J. Ashman, A.C.A., 'The management of Christian Aid: a critical review' (MSc thesis: City University, September 1972), (SOAS.CA2/D/13.6)

⁴⁶ Rev'd Alan Booth, letter to Hugh Samson (3 July 1974), (SOAS.CA2/D/15.1)

⁴⁷ Aid Advisory Committee, 'Report' (27 June 1975), (CAO.DIR.A)

rejected the accusation made in the heading of an article, published in *The Times*, that, 'inefficiency by charity led to loss of lives'⁴⁸; and in the second the delay was attributed to an overseas bank and led to a change in procedure for future transactions. The more fundamental grievance lay with CA's mode of operating through councils of churches. In the same article mentioned above and based on an interview with David Smithers, such councils were criticized as lacking, 'the expertise to give adequate supervision to development projects.'⁴⁹ A profound and bitter debate was set in motion, partly carried forward in the letters column of *The Times* and in the church press, concerning the accountability of CA and the effectiveness of its aid programmes.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, by June 1975, the Advisory Committee had completed its report. The focus was again on efficiency and accountability. The committee argued, 'that the resources available to CA ... call for a sharper definition of objectives and a concentration on the areas of greatest need.'⁵¹ It highlighted that there was scant liaison between different departments; that records and information flows were poor; and that little capacity existed to meet the demands that an emergency might place upon the organisation. It advocated that priorities needed to be set and functions and objectives redefined so as to enable more proactive actions and initiatives in new areas of work. The report indicated that the administrative delays of 1973 reflected a broader institutional malaise. The famines of the early 1970s in Ethiopia and the Sahel had stretched CA's aid administration beyond its capabilities. Reform was needed.

In order to respond to poverty more effectively and strategically, the Committee laid down recommendations for the reform and prioritisation of CA's policy-making and management systems: four regional committees were established (Africa; the Indian sub-continent; South East Asia and the Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean) and

⁴⁸ Clifford Longley, 'Inefficiency by charity led to loss of lives' *The Times*, 19 January 1976

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *The Times* (Longley, 19 January 1976; Slack, 21 & 23 January 1976; Smithers, 22 January 1976; Sinclair, 23 January 1976; Williams, 23 January 1976; Booth, 23 January 1976); *The Methodist Recorder* (29 January 1976; Smithers, 5 February 1976; Greet & Atkinson, 12 February 1976); & *The Church of England Newspaper* (6 February 1976; Slack, 14 February 1976; Smithers, 19 November 1976)

⁵¹ Aid Advisory Committee, 'Report' (27 June 1975), (CAO.DIR.A)

were delegated responsibility to approve all aid allocations; additional staff were employed; staff were encouraged to visit countries in which CA was committed, to brief the project officer on their return and so enable him/her to prioritise requests; and attempts were made at geographical and programme targeting: 'allocation policy should be directed towards making the greater part of CA's resources available to the poorest countries and to the pockets of real poverty in other countries.'⁵² The best way of achieving such targeting was interpreted as concentrating on those countries with per capita annual incomes of less than US\$ 200.⁵³

Staffing levels were to be increased across the organisation. The Committee called it 'a case of too large a programme administered by too few persons.'⁵⁴ Historically, CA had kept administrative costs down - in 1969/70, 3.1% of total expenses was spent on administration and 9.8% on fundraising.⁵⁵ The real cost of low overheads had been identified in an earlier independent report of 1972, which argued that the 'constant effort to keep overheads at a minimum ... has now reached a point, where the overhead target of 3% of income has become an end in itself', and that this mitigated against increased managerial efficiency.⁵⁶ The Committee agreed and blamed 'the desire to keep the establishment and the overhead administrative costs to the minimum' for inhibiting the aid administration from 'demanding those additions of staff which were desirable for a fully efficient administration.'⁵⁷ However, the concrete problem of maintaining low overheads remained unresolved. Public relations determined then as in the 1990s that charities were about 'charity', not business and so administrative expenses were to be kept low.

With regard to how CA related to the public, the Committee reported:

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ E. De Clerck, A. Keune & A. Kooke, 'A survey on funding agencies and development education' (Development Research Institute: The Netherlands, June 1972), (SOAS.CA2/D/9.5)

⁵⁶ L. J. Ashman, A.C.A., 'The management of Christian Aid: a critical review' (MSc thesis: City University, September 1972), (SOAS.CA2/D/13.6)

⁵⁷ Aid Advisory Committee, 'Report' (27 June 1975), (CAO.DIR.A)

‘there is general agreement that CA’s own shift of emphasis from “relief” to “development” is not widely understood in the constituency and that in this respect a major educational task remains to be done.’⁵⁸

The issuing of a Policy Statement in 1974, ‘Christian Aid and World Development’, went some way to meeting this need. Building upon the 1968 constitution, this firmly stated that:

‘while CA is primarily called to confront man with the need of his neighbour, and to find channels for effective action, it also has a direct responsibility and willingness to share with others in a nationwide understanding and response to that need ... A spokesman for the weak and poor is needed. Here, the Christian community as a whole, along with others like-minded, must be prepared to raise its voice and express its convictions based on the best information at its disposal.’⁵⁹

The issue of how much weight to give education and public information as opposed to overseas aid proved harder to deal with. By the mid-1970s this problem had reached a peak. Involvement in famines in Ethiopia and the Sahel had led to the recognition that it was not just war that created tragedies. They were as much created by the national and international neglect of peoples who remained marginal to the political and economic interests of those leveraging power. This posed the question of whether CA’s aims, to help communities in poorer countries find their own solutions to the problems of economic survival and betterment, be better achieved by solely concentrating on educating the British constituency about the unjust world economic structures. CA’s aid department was divided over this issue.⁶⁰ The Committee ultimately adopted a compromise position, advising that, ‘education is not an alternative to an aid programme, but an integral part of it’⁶¹ and that an educational programme is best financed as a by-product of a money-raising effort with a much larger aim: ‘our educational effectiveness depends, both in principle and for its financing, on our being seen to be practically effective in assisting the poorer world.’⁶²

The debate about CA’s partnerships, highlighted by the David Smithers affair, was another key focus of the report. As mentioned above, the contours of this problem

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ CA and World Development: policy statement (November 1974), (SOAS.CA2/D/22.9)

⁶⁰ David Smithers files. CAO.DIR.47-52

⁶¹ Aid Advisory Committee, ‘Report’ (27 June 1975), (CAO.DIR.A)

⁶² *ibid.*

lay in CA's origins and in the division between its role as a development agency and as a member of a wider ecumenical movement. At the heart of the criticism and debate of the mid-1970s lay the question, highlighted by a former Director of CA, the Rev'd Alan Booth of,

'whether we remain an agency within the complex ecumenical family suffering all the limitations and frustrations attendant on belonging to that family and not simply doing our own thing in our own way. Alternatively, should we be a more professional distinctly British church agency making many of the decisions ourselves about how we spend our money and being, therefore, liberated from many of the frustrations which arise when you have to adopt the role of servant to your Christian colleagues in other parts of the world?'⁶³

As an agency of the churches and a member of the ecumenical family, CA had a historical obligation to work with its ecumenical partners. As the Rev'd Alan Booth himself recognised, CA was 'fundamentally an expression of the life of the churches, as they try to fulfill their calling to serve humanity. Moreover, it is an expression of the desire of the churches to work together in unity, both at home and as part of the universal church throughout the world.'⁶⁴ In the words of the Advisory Committee, 'national councils of churches, initially designed to promote church co-operation over a wide field, were the natural original counterpart bodies with which CA, as a department of the British Council of Churches, could relate.'⁶⁵ The important qualifying point lay in a comment by the same committee that, 'it is right for CA first to seek local partners within the churches ... it has not, however, in the past confined itself to such channels where they were inadequate to the job in hand.'⁶⁶ Indeed, it pointed to the dangers of expecting too much from councils of churches, 'to burden a national council of churches with responsibility for a large development programme attracting substantial foreign finance could result in a major distortion of the programme and structure of the national council of churches itself, and for its own sake other channels may be preferable.'⁶⁷ The report concluded that where:

'there is no realistic prospect that ecumenical or other church channels will be adequate to the job needing to be done ... we recommend ... that the Board of

⁶³ Rev'd Alan Booth, letter to Kenneth Greet (27 January 1975), (CAO.DIR.47)

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Aid Advisory Committee, 'Report' (27 June 1975), (CAO.DIR.A)

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

CA should support bolder initiatives to find adequate partners and, if necessary, to draw them from a group considerably wider than the local Christian community.’⁶⁸

And recommended:

‘CA should strongly encourage efforts in the developing world directed to increasing the professional competence of the local churches in selecting, evaluating and supervising projects.’⁶⁹

In effect, the division between CA’s inter-church aid function and its function as a development agency was to be resolved by bolder initiatives in finding alternative partners and continued support to help turn churches and councils of churches into better development agencies. The basic contradiction was not resolved.

The Advisory Committee also focused on CA’s relationship with states. In the mid-1970s this relationship had assumed new importance as CA became internally divided over the issue of how ‘political’ the organisation should be. Within CA’s aid administration, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*⁷⁰ (published in Britain in 1972) had had an enormous and divisive impact.⁷¹ The concept of ‘conscientisation’ developed by Freire held that development could occur only through the growth of a public consciousness about the shortcomings of one’s own society and political system. The task for northern agencies was therefore to ‘empower’ people to undertake their own development. The project approach was discredited and a new approach which concentrated on advocacy work, development education and political lobbying developed. The concept of ‘conscientisation’ was greeted with enthusiasm by the more radical minds in CA. However many senior staff and trustees regarded it with misgiving. Essentially, divisions occurred between those supporting traditional fund-raising and project work and those who felt that CA’s mandate would be better achieved by supporting education and promoting the sort of enlightenment and ‘conscientisation’ among the poorer communities overseas which would lead them towards effective political action for their own advance.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1972)

⁷¹ Correspondence and memos between aid administration staff. CAO.DIR.47-52

Divisions among CA staff on this issue had moreover been carried into CA's constituency, with lively correspondence in the letter column of *Christian Aid News*.

CA's condemnation of the Nicaraguan contras and their American backers, support of victims of a repressive military dictatorship in Chile and of liberation movements in Mozambique were seen by some supporters as indicative of a left-wing stance. The response of CA's Africa regional desk, hiding its own internal divisions, was that,

'CA has a simple and logical position with regard to assisting work in areas under the control of liberation groups or for that matter dictatorial and oppressive governments. CA is concerned primarily and solely with assistance to people - the poor, deprived and oppressed ... Our responsibilities are on the one hand to the poor and deprived, but on the other hand to our own donors who trust CA to channel assistance to the most needy areas of the world. With other voluntary agencies CA is in the unique position of not having to bow to the wishes of governments or pressure groups - we do not have to work within the limits imposed on inter-governmental agencies like the United Nations.'⁷²

The Advisory Committee was more circumspect about CA's relations with states and advised that while:

'timidity within the law is as much to be avoided as the deliberate financing of subversion ... The general rule should be that CA is ready to assist poorer communities in ways which are clearly likely to increase the pressures for a juster society, but denies its own competence to intervene in the local political debate by word or money.'⁷³

The question about where 'pressure' ended and 'political debate' began remained unanswered.

The David Smithers affair and the Aid Advisory Committee suggest that the mid-1970s were characterised by internal debate and argument within CA about what different people at different levels of the organisation felt CA's role was and should be. To a degree, internal dynamics reflected broader debates within the aid community. The 1970s were a time of 'alternatives' in the theory and practice of development.⁷⁴ Old

⁷² Celia Williams, memo to Rev'd Alan Booth (23 September 1974), (SOAS.CA2/D/15.8)

⁷³ Aid Advisory Committee, 'Report' (27 June 1975), (CAO.DIR.A)

⁷⁴ For the new line in development and economic thought in the 1970s see Michael Lipton, *Why Poor People Stay Poor: a study of urban bias in world development* (Temple Smith: London, 1977); Gunnar Myrdal, 'Underdevelopment and the evolutionary imperative' *Third World Quarterly*, 1 (April 1979), pp. 24-42; Hollis B. Chenery et al., *Redistribution with Growth: policies to improve income distribution in developing countries in the context of economic growth* (Oxford University Press: London, 1974); Hans Singer, 'Dualism revisited: a new approach to the problems of the dual society in developing countries' *Journal of Development Studies*, 7 (October 1970), pp. 60-78; Hans Singer, *Technologies for Basic Needs* (International Labour Office: Geneva, 1977); E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: economics as if people mattered* (Harper & Row: New York, 1974)

theories and methodologies of reducing rural poverty were seen not to be working and new ideas about 'growth with equity', 'basic needs', 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'people-centred development' emerged. It was how to relate theoretical prescriptions to practice, as much as the more basic pressures of institutional growth, that lay at the heart of CA's internal conflicts. Operational mechanisms of the past had been adequate for the limited role of the past. Bolder initiatives, clearer strategy and modern management were needed for the development alternatives of the 1970s. As a result, 1974-75 were pivotal years in which CA's strategies regarding fund-raising, education, partners and relations with states were questioned. Ultimately, the reforms advocated and subsequently implemented by the Committee left unresolved a number of fundamental contradictions and internal divisions within CA.

2.3 *The search for professionalism: clarifying objectives and strategy*

In the mid-1980s the international community turned to NGOs as the most effective channel for meeting the new criteria of reaching the poor.⁷⁵ The high profile enjoyed by NGOs in the relief of famine in Ethiopia in 1984-5 - as much as 80% of the relief assistance provided between 1984-1991 in the government-held areas and those areas controlled by the Eritrean and Tigrayan liberation movements was channeled through NGOs⁷⁶ - crystallized their favourable reputation. Observers spoke of the 1980s as the 'decade of NGOs.'⁷⁷ This section looks at the relevance of such optimism for CA and at how CA positioned itself within the world of relief and development.

Certainly, the increase in official funding during the 1980s marked an important episode in CA's evolving capabilities. Mechanisms for the official sponsorship of the voluntary sector in Britain had emerged in the mid-1970s. This was partly in response to new philosophies of 'development alternatives' pushing NGOs into the arena as the

⁷⁵ Borton, 'Recent trends in the international relief system', pp. 187-201; Michael Bratton, 'The politics of government-NGO relations in Africa' *World Development*, 17 (1989), pp. 569-87; Korten, 'Third generation NGO strategies', pp. 145-59

⁷⁶ Borton, 'Recent trends in the international relief system', pp. 203-204

⁷⁷ Hellinger, 'NGOs and the large aid donors', pp. 135-144



most suitable agents for their implementation. In 1974, a Disaster Unit (now the Emergency Aid Department) was set up within the Ministry of Overseas Development to work with the leading charities, those on the Disasters Emergency Committee, and to use them as a channel for cash and material assistance. The Joint Funding Scheme followed in 1975. This allowed for the co-funding of 'new' 'developmental' projects which would be submitted by the British charities and in which the Overseas Development Administration would meet up to 50% of the cost. It was greeted with caution by CA and on the proviso that CA would not 'allow ourselves to come to be regarded as quasi-official organisations or as an instrument of British foreign policy.'⁷⁸ By the end of 1977, a variant of the Scheme was introduced by which CA was allowed to receive a guaranteed block grant. Projects were still submitted for approval, but alternative submissions could be made in the place of any which were not approved at the first attempt. In 1976, the European Community introduced procedures for the joint financing of projects and for the allocation of emergency assistance and food aid. The most significant increase in official sponsorship occurred in the mid-1980s, largely in response to the enhanced profile of NGOs generally during the Ethiopian famine. Between 1984 and 1989, official funding for CA increased four-fold and CA set up an office to deal specifically with government support for its programmes:

Table 1.1 Christian Aid: Income from Official Sources (£) 1982-89

1982/83	1983/84	1984/85	1985/86	1986/87	1987/88	1988/89
589,119	862,889	2,176,700	3,242,351	2,797,186	5,583,000	8,090,849

Source: CA financial statements and reports (1951-84), (SOAS.CA/J/1)

From the beginning CA and other major charities introduced self-restraining ordinances, placing an upper limit on the income accepted from official sources. In 1978 the ceiling stood at 10% CA's total income; in 1984 this was revised upwards to

⁷⁸ Vernon Littlewood, memo to Rev'd Alan Booth (23 January 1975), (SOAS.CA2/D/22.3)

15% total income, exclusive of emergency relief; and in 1988 a 20% ceiling was applied to non-emergency income and the over-all ceiling revised to 30%.⁷⁹

Yet the confidence and capability signaled by increasing official funding of CA hid fundamental weaknesses within the organisation. While CA had survived the crisis of the mid-1970s and had responded with important reforms, these reforms had failed to resolve key internal contradictions and conflicts. The David Smithers affair itself did not disappear but evolved into a long-running legal dispute well into the 1980s. This proved a huge burden to both the staff and the Board of CA and a major distraction in terms of primary tasks.⁸⁰ In addition, CA continued to face key institutional weaknesses, as identified by a former Director.⁸¹ Firstly, there was a lack of direct and relevant development experience within the organisation. Many of the Board members' experience of the Third World was out-dated while the development experience of the senior staff was insufficient. Secondly, there was a conflict between the radicals and the conservatives, between those who felt it was necessary for CA to position itself on the side of radical change and those who favoured a more cautious approach. The tension reflected the debates centered in CA's aid department in the 1970s over support for liberation movements and empowerment. The real tension, in the 1980s as in the 1970s, was between those who were most comfortable with a disaster-response type of approach and those who were ready to tangle with the ambiguities, messiness, uncertainties and confusions of a genuine commitment to development. Even among the latter, there was great uncertainty about how CA could and should get involved. Thirdly, there was a clear cleavage between the regional staff - those most in touch with the local churches and the donor base - and the office staff and particularly the aid department. Individual aid officers tended to decide how development grants would be dispersed, leaving little room for developing a more pro-active and strategic approach and little opportunity for educating and mobilising the donor base.

⁷⁹ June Wyer, *ODA income for Africa/Middle East committee*, (CA: London, August 1992)

⁸⁰ CA.7, Charles Elliott (former Director of CA), (private communication with author, 25 July 1997)

⁸¹ *ibid.*

From the mid-1980s, with more resources at its disposal and a recognition that the persistence of poverty and scale of emergencies (notably in Sudan and Ethiopia in the mid-1980s) continued to challenge the agency's capabilities, the need to clarify goals and strategy became a critical concern of CA's senior staff. Some felt that CA did not have a sufficiently clear idea of what the organisation was trying to achieve, and that its objectives were too vague.⁸² An external observer judged CA in 1984 to have been 'almost wholly without clear goals or future strategy.'⁸³ The challenges of the 1980s required a new strategic voice. Consequently, in 1984, a management consultant, Charles Handy, was called in. The problem identified by Charles Handy was that as a voluntary organisation, CA suffered from the assumption that 'when people of one mind and one faith are gathered together the organization of them will be necessarily harmonious, trouble-free and efficient.'⁸⁴ The problems facing CA were due to the 'business of combining a lot of individual wills and talents into one organization.'⁸⁵ The result was a confusion of roles and purposes. The solution was to place a premium on communication, on bringing the voices together and on modernising management.

On 1st April 1986, modern management in the form of a Matrix management system was introduced. The aim was:

'(a) to spread responsibility and decision-making more widely throughout the organisation where appropriate knowledge and experience is readily available, rather than concentrate too much decision-making round the Director and Associate Director, and (b) to foster a better inter-relation between the varied aspects of CA's work (project funding and education for example) by forming inter-disciplinary teams.'⁸⁶

Building on the reforms of 1975, the matrix system aimed to establish a more dynamic and strategic framework for decision-making and a more coherent linking of

⁸² Max Peberdy, 'What's Wrong with the Focus?' (27 October 1985), (CAO.DIR.208)

⁸³ Cited in Burnell, *Charity, Politics and the Third World*, p. 99

⁸⁴ Charles Handy, 'Decision-making in Christian Aid' (June 1984), (CAO.DIR.193)

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Michael Taylor, 'An explanatory note on the matrix' (February 1987), (CAO.DIR.187)

activities.⁸⁷ Individual's roles and jobs were to be defined and lines of authority delineated: 'charitable organizations often prefer to leave roles unclear because they think it gives more scope to the individual. It is a mistake because it only causes confusion.'⁸⁸ Concerns were again expressed about the need to tie CA's educational and operational work together more closely at all levels in the organisation. The newly structured Africa/Middle East Group was challenged to:

'to ensure that in decision making regarding future relationships and continued support the point of view of all CA partners in the Region is as well understood as possible, and that the views of the ecumenical family and CA's supporters are considered in making such decisions.'⁸⁹

To address such a challenge, a number of tools were introduced. Country Briefing Papers were developed to share information with a wider range of people and to push project work into a more strategic framework. These papers were drawn up in consultation with partner organisations abroad. A typical policy paper offered some political, social and economic analysis; a strategic plan indicating where special attention should be given to certain parts of the country, certain groups and certain issues (for example, sustainable agriculture or gender); and a survey of the players in the field and their present and potential contributions. Once the policy was agreed, grants to particular partners and projects would be considered in the light of it.

Another device was to prioritise policy, both at an organisational level and at the level of CA's relationships with individual countries and partners. In 1982 geographical prioritisation was attempted, using such criteria as poverty, population figures, church partners, historical links and strategic, educational and political importance. The exercise proved difficult to carry out as staff and partners alike did not want to see CA withdraw from certain areas. It did however result in a categorisation of countries, with

⁸⁷ The old departments (Aid, Finance, Communications, Education) were replaced by 5 Sectors and 4 Groups. The Groups were responsible for the whole of CA's work overseas and at home (fund-raising, funding, education, information and communication, finance) in relation to four regions: Asia/Pacific, Africa/Middle East, Latin America/Caribbean, UK/Ireland. The Sectors related to areas of special competence or discipline: Aid, Fundraising, Education, Communication, Finance. Members from each of the Sectors were attached to each Group.

⁸⁸ Charles Handy, 'Decision-making in Christian Aid' (June 1984), (CAO.DIR.193)

⁸⁹ Africa/Middle East group, 'Aims and objectives' (May 1986), (CAO.AF/ME.326)

Ethiopia designated a priority area.⁹⁰ An attempt to formulate priority policy areas was made: food and agriculture, with special attention to small-holder agriculture and food aid; health, especially Aids and primary health care; training, considered a priority by CA's partners; debt; conflict and development; and women.⁹¹ Project guidelines in various sectors were elaborated. These set out questions to be asked of any project in order to evaluate how it tied in with current prioritisation or policy.

Changing styles of funding were institutionalised. The block grant funding of total programmes of the late 1970s were developed into country programmes and consortia involvement, and round table structures set up which brought North and South, agencies, mission boards and national councils of churches face-to-face to discuss programmes and decide how they should be funded. The aim was to create a strategic and flexible aid policy and to permit more integrated development programmes. Through the development of round tables moreover, the historic problem about CA's accountability to the holistic needs of its southern ecumenical partners was finally resolved. Round tables brought together, around one table, representatives of the southern churches and councils of churches, the World Council of Churches and the northern funding agencies, both missionary societies and development agencies. The holistic framework was generated by the southern partners as they set out their total programme, including evangelism, Christian education, relief and development. The funding agencies could then support different aspects of the programme according to their various mandates.

However such devices were essentially technical. What they failed to address was a more fundamental task: 'to clarify and articulate what CA believes about aid and development.'⁹² In many ways, the emphasis on restructuring obscured the more significant and long-term problem for CA about how to find and articulate a voice. The problem lay, according to one staff member, in a 'wooliness about much of our

⁹⁰ In 1983 priorities areas were Namibia, South Africa, Lebanon, Zaire, the Sahel, Sudan, Ethiopia, Egypt and the Palestinians. Africa/Middle East group, 'Priorities: countries and issues' (16 December 1986), (CAO.AF/ME.326)

⁹¹ Jenny Borden, inter-office memo (13 January 1988), (CAO.AF/ME.578)

⁹² Michael Taylor, 'Programme for 86 - 87' (17 December 1985), (CAO.DIR.208)

thinking' and 'a lack of clarity in strategy, i.e. in our thinking about goals and means.'⁹³ The implication was that CA lacked intellectual clarity, and that 'the concepts we've taken from the secular disciplines have been haphazardly inserted into our thinking.'⁹⁴ What was required was a body of knowledge, understanding and theory which could guide CA's actions:

'I am not suggesting that we should aim to become a one-message organisation, or that there should be a CA creed that all staff must accept, but we do need some channel, some forum, by which we can share ideas and develop a more rigorous understanding of the issues. Because we don't have a common pool of experience, our messages become the idiosyncratic views of whoever happens to have been given responsibility for their production.'⁹⁵

The debate of the 1980s about intellectual clarity and institutional strategy reflected a broader concern about power. Power had been repeatedly recognised as a key issue in ecumenical documents from the 1960s. In the 1980s, it gained a new momentum in CA. In part this was because of CA's growing experience of working in deeply polarised societies, such as Sudan and Ethiopia, and in part because of the continued awareness of the structural causes of poverty. To some staff, establishing a clearer idea of who and what CA was, involved deciding just how radical it dared to be as an organisation; how far it should go in its commitment to a just society.⁹⁶ While the devices implemented by the matrix system were relevant to the issue of power in that they aimed to share decisions about the use of resources and bring the interested parties around one table, they failed to address CA's broader role within the relief and development community. What was needed, in the words of CA's Director, was 'a rigorous theology of power'⁹⁷ to enable CA to challenge the existing order.

2.4 1987: the year of commitments

In 1987 CA's Board adopted a Statement of Commitment, 'To Strengthen the Poor'. This represented a corporate manifesto, supplementing CA's

⁹³ Max Peberdy, 'What's Wrong with the Focus?' (27 October 1985), (CAO.DIR.208)

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Michael Taylor, 'Programme for 86 - 87' (17 December 1985), (CAO.DIR.208)

mandate, as laid out in its constitution. The statement spelled out the charity's sense of purpose, for the benefit of its own officers and supporters and for its overseas partners.⁹⁸ It was an important marker in CA's evolution, representing the culmination of the debates of the 1970s and 1980s and an attempt to clarify CA's message.

The statement advocated a strategy for justice and a commitment to 'strengthen the poor.' In the words of CA's then Director, it reflected the belief that 'the most effective and respectful way to bring about lasting improvement in the quality of life of the powerless is to put (back) into their own hands the means to help themselves.'⁹⁹ Such a strategy for justice was taken forward in key policy areas. Firstly, in the more campaigning style of CA's work in the late 1980s. CA ran its own direct campaigns on such complex issues as debt, aid and trade and how they interacted with conditions of poverty overseas. The 1987 statement advocated that:

'education must increase understanding of poverty and what can be done to remove it; but it must go further and increase understanding of the need for a strategy to strengthen the poor so that more and more are in a position to support it.'¹⁰⁰

To do this, CA attempted to build on the interrelationship between particular issues overseas and particular constituencies within this country - programmes centered around land reform overseas were to be targeted at work with rural constituencies in the UK. Secondly, in a re-examination of notions of partnership and development strategy:

'This strategy for justice is not ours. We must pursue it in partnership with the poor and all who stand by them. We commit ourselves to partnerships of mutual sharing and accountability.'¹⁰¹

Development was to be bottom-up and priority was placed on participation, shared decision-making, capacity-building, the development of exchanges and networks and accountability. Finally, the 1987 commitment provided a clear statement about power and the relationship between non-states and states. It recognised that overseas partners

⁹⁸ Previous such statements included 'CA and World Development' (1974); & 'The Task of CA' (1981)

⁹⁹ Michael Taylor, 'Programme 1986/87' (Africa/Middle East forum meeting, 22 May 1986), (CAO.AF/ME.326)

¹⁰⁰ CA, *To Strengthen the Poor: a statement of commitment adopted by the Board of CA*, (CA: London, July 1987)

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

did not operate in political vacuums and that the tendency for northern agencies to cast them as 'neutral' failed to address the political, and sometimes military, reality; the role of the partners; and the institutional dilemmas facing them. Experiences during the high profile Ethiopian famine, in the mid-1980s, when relief became overtly politicized focused attention on this, although experiences in Biafra in the 1960s and Central America in the 1970s had already made it an issue. A commitment to:

'act strategically to strengthen the arm of the poor until they can stand up to those who so often act against them, and have the power to determine their own development under God,'¹⁰²

clearly recognised the need to seek political solutions to humanitarian injustices.

While the implications of the statement were clear, whether CA would be able to achieve the new agenda was not so clear. A commitment to a bolder campaigning style continued to confront opposition among CA staff who believed that the organisation should not engage in controversial, political, or conflictive situations, and continued to come up against the rules of charity law as interpreted by the charity commissioners.¹⁰³ A commitment to pursue equal partnerships and a bottom-up development strategy was riddled with ambiguities and contradictions as recognised by CA's then Overseas Aid Director:

'in the extent to which our partners are powerful in their own rights and cannot be said to be the poor and powerless; and in the extent to which CA exercises its own power which if used in a dominating way would not be true to the conviction.'¹⁰⁴

Difficulties arose on an operational level:

'we are perpetually being pulled to spend more and more funds in less poor countries where there is infrastructure, educated committed middle class activists within and outside the churches working with the poor and bringing CA in touch with them ... I am conscious that it is very easy for us to find good partners and programmes and allocate a lot of funds in such areas, and much more difficult to be involved in the poorest areas.'¹⁰⁵

And on a strategic level, there was real concern within CA about the 'conflict between what CA in the conviction sees as a priority and what many of our partners see as their

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Jenny Borden, memo to Michael Taylor (9 April 1988), (CAO.DIR.208)

¹⁰⁴ Jenny Borden, memo to Michael Taylor (28 May 1986), (CAO.AF/ME.326)

¹⁰⁵ Jenny Borden, memo to Michael Taylor (13 December 1985), (CAO.DIR.191)

priorities.¹⁰⁶ This raised the question of how far CA should exercise power in looking for new partners for whom the 1987 commitment would seem to be a priority. Despite the language of 'empowerment' and 'participation', the power relations that underlay the development process and their manifestation in top-down 'project' approaches thus remained decisive.¹⁰⁷ Finally, CA's commitment to solidarity with the poor was problematic. While its actions in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s, explored in chapters 4 and 5, were characterised by a remarkable degree of solidarity, at the same time, they exposed the continuing structural limitations imposed on such a mandate.

While emerging from CA's own specific history and debates, the 1987 commitment, to a large extent, reflected the preoccupations of secular development theory in the 1980s in which development agencies were recast as facilitators and catalysts, rather than as implementers and providers and in which the 'project-by-project on its merits' approach was again rejected and a broader 'process' approach - an approach that continued to prove so elusive in practice - advocated. The implication was that CA, in clarifying its message, continued to follow the development fashions and lexicon of the secular world. The question of 'how radical we [CA] dare to be, and how many casualties we are prepared to have on the prophetic road'¹⁰⁸, remained unanswered.

3. Christian Aid in the 1990s

In the run-up to CA's 50th Birthday in September 1995, policy and priorities were again re-examined. While an anniversary provided a suitable occasion for reflection, the need for such reflection lay more with renewed debates within CA about its role and capabilities. As in 1975 and 1984, so again in 1994, CA restructured. As in the decades earlier, so in the 1990s, such restructuring obscured a more fundamental and less tangible malaise, that of finding a clear voice. This section explores the key issues and evolving capabilities of CA in the 1990s.

¹⁰⁶ Jenny Borden, memo to Michael Taylor (28 May 1986), (CAO.AF/ME.326)

¹⁰⁷ See chapter 6 below

¹⁰⁸ Max Peberdy, 'What's Wrong with the Focus?' (27 October 1985), (CAO.DIR.208)

In 1994, the matrix management system was replaced and staff organised into smaller, more flexible inter-disciplinary teams. Again, a large part of the restructuring was aimed at tying communication work more closely to CA's operational work¹⁰⁹; and at delegating decision-making closer to where the greater information lay.¹¹⁰

Prioritisation, at an organisational and programme level, was pursued. Arguments against geographical concentration continued to be strong: the arbitrary nature of the GNP yardstick and the pockets of real poverty which it could conceal; the categories of need, deprivation and suffering other than the purely economic; Britain's historical responsibilities etc. Programme prioritisation was equally rife with difficulties, coming up against issues of accountability: how far was it right for CA to identify sectoral priorities for a region, if these were not the priorities coming to them from their natural partners?; was there justification for seeking new partners for whom these were priorities?; was there justification in abandoning or reducing support for long standing partners with different priorities? Inevitably priorities set in the London office did not automatically line up with funding requests from partners. Concerns about the use and abuse of power in setting the agenda and choosing the partnerships continued to be expressed.¹¹¹

A central concern of the restructuring in the 1990s, as in the 1970s and 1980s, was communication and the prioritisation of CA's information and education system. To this end, regional overseas teams were given responsibilities not just for aid allocation but through the communications officer, for fund-raising, education and information work. Further, the communications officer was expected to visit the field at least once a year thereby enabling the project-work of the team to be backed up by the relevant story-gathering necessary for publicity and fund-raising. Whether the contradiction between CA's analysis of the problem and the motivation for concrete

¹⁰⁹ For example, funding proposals and commitments for the following year of each team were included in annual Country Programme Papers, giving a clear indication of the strategy to be pursued in the year ahead.

¹¹⁰ The responsibility for aid allocation had originally rested with the board of CA, in the mid-1970s, it was delegated to the relevant regional committees and in the 1990s to the relevant team.

¹¹¹ CA.3, Polly Mathewson; CA.3, Ruth Segal; FFHC.7, Beverley Jones; ERD.7, Jenny Borden

action which it suggested to the general public was reconciled through this managerial arrangement remained open to interpretation. While the increased premium placed on communication helped reduce tension within the teams, it was clear that tension still existed at a broader institutional level between the overseas regional teams and the media team which had responsibility for general communication: 'what is going to be attractive to the public isn't necessarily the priorities of the project.'¹¹² This impacted in two ways. Firstly, it led to a 'gap between what people think we do or want us to do, and what in fact we are doing.'¹¹³ Secondly, it led to the recognition that public relations was important. CA's 'Development Project Guidelines', were used to find out how useful a project was going to be for education and media work. While it is clearly incorrect to imply that project selection was governed by public relations, there remained an interaction between the two. Difficulties continued to arise as criteria for media work did not necessarily correlate with criteria for good development work.

The ability of CA, and other British agencies, to pursue development education and advocacy at home in the 1990s continued to be determined by UK charity law. This was especially so in a climate of increasing competition for funds, when charity law had more leverage - charitable status brought with it tax concessions worth up to 30% of an agency's income, and allowed an agency to tap into charitable giving by the British public. Charities in Britain were differentiated from non-charitable bodies by the charity commissioners' 'guidelines' on political activity. The 1994 revised guidelines by the charity commission on 'political activities and campaigning by charities' stated:

'By the very nature of their knowledge and social concern ... some charities are well placed to play a part in public debate on important issues of the day and to make an important contribution to the development of public policy ... It would be wrong to think that this cannot and should not happen ... where charities wish to raise issues in a way which will inform public debate and influence decisions of public bodies, great care must be taken to ensure that the issues concerned are relevant to their purposes and that the means by which they raise them are within their powers and appropriate to a non-political organisation'¹¹⁴

The problem of defining 'purposes' and 'appropriate means' was rife with difficulties.

¹¹² CA.3, Polly Mathewson

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Cited in Oxfam, *The Oxfam Handbook of Development and Relief*, (Oxfam: Oxford, 1995), p. 390

Definitions had evolved on a case-law approach, 'on the grounds that it allows flexibility as new needs arise or old ones become obsolete or are satisfied.'¹¹⁵ The effect had been that charitable agencies were at the mercy of the charity commissioners' interpretation of what constituted 'appropriate' political activity. Although the commission has not been over-eager to remove charitable status, the financial implications of such a move were well understood by agencies and the possibility of deregistration served as a considerable implicit discouragement to testing the boundaries.

As early as 1964, the Freedom From Hunger Campaign discussed above and supported by CA came under the active investigation of the commissioners who argued that calls for more international concern for the problem of world hunger were taking charities away from charitable concerns and into the realm of politics. This broadened into a debate about whether humanitarian aid for development as opposed to relief was 'charitable' or 'political'. In their 1963 report, the commissioners accepted, in the development charities favour, that it was indeed 'charitable.'¹¹⁶ In the 1970s, the commitment of some overseas charities to increase education and advocacy brought further investigations. In 1970 CA and Oxfam were forced to retreat from the 'Action for World Development' initiative and in 1981 from direct funding of the *New Internationalist*. Attempts to promote changes in the law (or the maintenance of an existing law) of any government were deemed political purposes by the commissioners, and hence not charitable. Moreover, to seek a particular line of political administration or policy was also deemed to be a political purpose, and in strict terms not charitable. In 1978 CA was advised not to make undesignated grants to the World Council of Churches following a publication of a report by the Council's Commission on the Churches Participation in Development which admitted that it financed political action. The Commission had been set up in 1970, in order to find a way around what some

¹¹⁵ Chris Dolan, 'British development NGOs and advocacy in the 1990s' in Michael Edwards & David Hulme (eds.), *Making a Difference: NGOs and development in a changing world* (Earthscan in association with SCF (UK): London, 1992), p. 207

¹¹⁶ Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, p. 90

had felt to be the rather conservative and ecclesiastically-oriented agencies of national councils of churches, and to establish counterpart organisations overseas more radically involved in new forms of community development. Essentially charities like CA had to refer all advocacy to humanitarian motivations. This denial of the politics of poverty and of development, of the fact that, 'so much of the deprivation which we are mandated to meet ... (was) politically caused and politically perpetuated,'¹¹⁷ seriously limited CA's ability to educate the public about the real situation.

For many staff in the 1990s, CA's ecumenical partnerships and inter-church function continued to be a dilemma, reflecting a solidarity that had little to do with solidarity with the poor. Yet at the same time it was recognised that the church's grassroots networks were extremely valuable in reaching the rural poor. As a staff member argued, 'the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is in a position to reach large numbers of the population and have structures already in place to do so.'¹¹⁸ In this respect, it was felt that, 'it is our responsibility to help them become a good development agency because they are in a position to do good work if they actually had the institutional capacity and the resources.'¹¹⁹ This echoed the conclusion of the Aid Advisory Committee in 1974:

'where the indigenous Christian community is itself already seriously involved, or trying to become so, in general development programmes beyond its own religious boundaries, it can be an invaluable partner with CA's operations because it speaks genuinely for the poorer and needier communities.'¹²⁰

For as long as CA's ecumenical partners 'wanted' to help the poor, then it was felt within CA that the agency had an obligation to support them in doing so.¹²¹ It could be argued that behind this conditionality lay a consistency that had enabled CA to build lasting commitments to its partners and had enabled those partners to conduct their negotiations on a more equal basis. As Paul Spray, Head of the Aid Sector in 1989 said, 'Oxfam can walk away from its partners. CA cannot.'¹²² CA's interventions

¹¹⁷ CA, 'Year Report' (April 1982-March 1983), (SOAS.CA/J/1)

¹¹⁸ CA.3, Ruth Segal

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Aid Advisory Committee, 'Report' (27 June 1975), (CAO.DIR.A)

¹²¹ ERD.7, Jenny Borden

¹²² Cited in Burnell, *Charity, Politics and the Third World*, p. 63

tended to portray a degree of consistency. In an environment where the power of the media and the necessities of strategic prioritisation were sometimes seen to, 'take one into Africa and Central America and then appear to be crisis-driven and media-led'¹²³, such consistency was especially valuable.

By the 1990s a structural shift in CA's major sources of income had occurred. In 1990, official sources supplied an amount equivalent to just under one half of CA's overseas expenditure and one third of CA's total income.¹²⁴ Roughly equal amounts came from the Overseas Development Administration and the European Community. In the same year, the ceiling on income received from official sources - 30% CA's total income - had been reached, largely on account of food aid grants to Eritrea and Tigray and redefined, remaining at 30% but exclusive of food aid grants. In 1973/4, about 52% of CA's total income came from Christian Aid Week. In 1993/4, 22% total income came from Christian Aid Week. In 1975/6, the first year when they were applicable, government grants totaled £10,000, equivalent to less than 0.25% total income. Government grants, in 1993/4, totaled £18,205,000, equivalent to about 43% total income.¹²⁵ In the 1990s, government funding to CA went predominantly to the Africa/Middle East regions, driven by emergency funding and demands for food aid in these crisis regions. From the late 1980s, the Africa/Middle East region accounted for 78%-100% emergency funding from the Disaster Unit and 100% of food aid from the Overseas Development Administration's European Community Food Aid Department.¹²⁶

Clearly, there were problems with official funding: the implications of sudden withdrawal, political independence, distortion of criteria or priorities, and partners' attitudes. Frequent discussion about such possibilities have occurred within CA. The importance of cultivating plural sources of support and of maintaining fungibility of expenditure allocations funded from non-official sources was recognised. As a result,

¹²³ ERD.7, Jenny Borden

¹²⁴ Burnell, *Charity, Politics and the Third World*, p. 209

¹²⁵ CA financial statements and reports (1951-84), (SOAS.CA/J/1); Year Ending 30 September 1974 (SOAS.CA/J/1); CA, *Report Back 1993-1994: working for change*, (CA: London, 1994)

¹²⁶ June Wyer, *ODA Income for Africa/Middle East committee*

CA in the 1990s continued to seek funds from other agencies, such as Comic Relief and was involved in a whole range of styles of funding from individual projects on a bilateral basis to multilateral block grant funding of major programmes and organisations. Ultimately, the claim by CA not to have surrendered control of its own agenda or to have experienced undue interference in its choice of projects, programmes and operating procedures is probably sound. Jenny Borden, CA's Overseas Director, argued that CA had a strong and clearly articulated role and that it was not vulnerable to adopting the development agenda of its funders, 'we take official funding when we want to and refuse it when we don't.' Moreover, 'by receiving funds from official sources, it gives CA greater access to dialoguing about issues.'¹²⁷ Indeed, relative to other European countries, UK government funding to NGOs in the period 1988-91 was comparatively undeveloped and represents a very small proportion of the total aid budget: 4.3% in 1988/89, 4.1% in 1989/9, and 5.2% in 1990/91.¹²⁸ As June Wyer, leader of CA's co-financing team, remarked, 'concern at CA is not so much about exceeding ceilings as about declining levels of official income.'¹²⁹

By the 1990s, CA found itself increasingly operating in situations characterised by a decline in state power. Such situations added a new dimension to debates about the relationship between aid agencies and states. As Jenny Borden warned, 'the new jargon is very much about civil society but states are better than no states.'¹³⁰ Certainly the perceived decline in the power, or indeed very existence, of the state in the post-Cold War era had been identified by many aid practitioners as crucial to prospects for sustainable development. With reference to CA's mandate, Jenny Borden explained that 'an important development is that in some countries - for instance, Eritrea - CA is supporting good governments.'¹³¹ In this respect it is recognised that voluntary action should not replace governmental action but should complement it. Clearly what was crucial and what created difficulties continued to be the conditionality of 'good'. Where

¹²⁷ ERD.7, Jenny Borden

¹²⁸ June Wyer, *ODA Income for Africa/Middle East committee*

¹²⁹ CA.4, June Wyer

¹³⁰ ERD.7, Jenny Borden

¹³¹ *ibid.*

the reality was of an increase in state power, often to the detriment of vulnerable and oppressed groups, the task remained one of accountability to people and not to states.

Certainly, the role of CA in the world of relief and development was very different in the 1990s to the 1960s: 'NGOs [in the 1990s] need to see their role more in scaling-up and in being involved in the broader picture than just in individual projects.'¹³² While this 'reduces the level of personal satisfaction that can be obtained by the staff through a small scale project, the important thing is the overall programme and not necessarily the success/failure of an individual project.'¹³³ This conception of CA's role in the 1990s ties in with Korten's conception of 3rd generation NGOs¹³⁴ which, concerned with issues of sustainability and breadth of impact, become less directly involved at village or project level and increasingly involved in processes facilitating development by other organizations:

'while a second generation strategy is directed to building capacities in individual communities to meet needs through self-reliant action, third generation strategy will concentrate on reorienting supportive systems and policies so that they strengthen the capacity of many communities to address identified needs.'¹³⁵

By the 1990s, it was no longer acceptable, in development theory, for NGOs to work exclusively at the local level.¹³⁶ Capability was defined in terms of securing linkages between the 'micro' level and broader development policies whether by disseminating understanding about development; or by influencing changes in donor policies and action. As in previous decades, CA was challenged to define its position and articulate its voice within the broader development environment. In the 1990s, increasingly operating at a macro level, this meant defining its attitude to aid in general, clarifying where it stood in development economics, and articulating what it meant by poverty and human rights.¹³⁷ The indication was that while CA in the 1990s appeared

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ Korten, 'Third generation NGO strategies', pp. 145-59

¹³⁵ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Voluntary Aid for Development: the role of nongovernmental organizations* (OECD: Paris, 1988)

¹³⁶ For analysis of shifting development theory see Korten, 'Third generation NGO strategies', pp. 145-159; and Charles Elliott, 'Some aspects of relations between the North and South in the NGO sector' *World Development*, 15 Supplement (1987), pp. 57-68

¹³⁷ FFHC.7, Beverley Jones

ready to become a more strategic and prophetic organisation, it had still not got to the stage of knowing what it should be prophetic about. It had not clarified its message.

4. A Process of Adaptation Reconsidered

The analysis above has focused on five key themes in CA's history: development strategy; fund-raising; education; partners; and relations with governments. It has shown how CA, in the context of a changing operational environment, defined its role and capabilities in relation to these themes. A fundamental part of such a process has been the need to negotiate with key structural and ideological contradictions which in turn have exposed different voices within CA. It has been only by analysing CA as a complex social institution, rather than as a structure that simply and rationally expresses a set of objective interests, that a real understanding of its history has been reached.

Four main contradictions have been identified. Firstly, the conflicting perceptions within CA of the organisation's development strategy. In the 1960s CA became a multi-functional charity - it was committed to disaster relief, refugees development programmes, development education in Britain, policy research and advocacy, and the lobbying of Western governments and multinational corporations. Problems of prioritization and strategy have inevitably occurred. The response in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s was to restructure. Typically this focused on improving communication flows: to increase the ability to tap into expertise and experience where it was greatest; to identify priorities so as to increase impact; and to define objectives so as to allocate aid strategically. Organizational reforms and modern management did not however remedy the more fundamental structural problem, that of what different people at different levels have perceived CA's role to be: should CA's expressed concern be limited to the level of its active concern?; should CA focus on specific groups of poor or should it address the 'world's poor'?; should CA reflect the majority opinion of its constituency or should it allow its project policy to develop faster than that majority opinion?; should CA stimulate a larger discussion? etc. Further complication arose from

the division of CA's domestic and overseas constituency between those who saw its primary function as a development agency and those who saw it as part of a wider ecumenical movement. Throughout its history, CA has had difficulties clarifying its voice. To do so would have exposed fundamental structural and ideological contradictions.

The second major contradiction faced by CA lay in its wish to present a more positive image of developing countries' population's own efforts and how this might effect the outcome of its own fund-raising appeals. There remained a structural contradiction between CA's financial survival, dependent as it was on the public's support for identifiable projects, on tangible 'relief' and its broader and more long-term objective of addressing the real causes of poverty and educating the public about the real purpose of charitable giving.

Thirdly, the structural and ideological contradictions surrounding notions of partnership and accountability. Over the decades, CA's partnerships shifted fundamentally, from primarily indirect funding relationships through the World Council of Churches in the 1960s to more direct 'partnerships' in the 1980s. Essentially, this was in response to problems of creating strategic and efficient channels for aid allocation. Yet as Charles Elliott, a former Director of CA, remarked: 'quite frankly, good overseas partners are as scarce as gold dust.'¹³⁸ Good 'partnerships' are equally problematic and the area of discourse associated with partnerships and with any commitment to 'strengthen the poor' and to 'justice' is riddled with ambiguities and begged questions, about the nature of community, the nature of participation and the nature of styles of authority within partnerships. While the 'new orthodoxy' of the late 1980s called for a fundamental shift from the northern to the southern NGO as the leader of the development process, it is not clear whether partnerships became any more real or remained dialogues of unequals. CA's Director in 1990, Michael Taylor argued

¹³⁸ Charles Elliott, in *Minutes of Evidence to Foreign Affairs Committee* (1987), p. 106 cited in Burnell, *Charity, Politics and the Third World*, p.106

that development workers, like evangelists, are 'still far too arrogant. We still believe we know what is good for people.'¹³⁹

Finally, the politics of state-NGO relations were riddled with contradictions. Throughout CA's history the principle of humanitarian neutrality, the idea that CA operated 'above politics', had formally defined CA's relations with states at home and overseas. Yet within this lay a fundamental contradiction, that 'so much of the deprivation which we are mandated to meet ... [is] politically caused and politically perpetuated.'¹⁴⁰ No aid activity could ever be neutral unless its effect was zero as all aid projects were likely in one way or another to have affected such factors as the distribution of income, the balance of power, social mobility and economic opportunities in the recipient community or nation. Mandated to assist the poor and deprived, and operating in situations where 'neutral' humanitarian ground was often conspicuous by its absence, CA's definition of its role clearly evolved. Arguably, as a non-operational NGO, CA was possibly able to pursue a more flexible policy and higher profile in the field of international lobbying than other charities; illegal solidarity and active campaigning did not threaten its field operations in the way it would other NGOs - CA is non-operational, its' funded programs project an essentially indigenous profile and are not clearly identifiable as 'CA', 'Oxfam is Oxfam wherever it is'¹⁴¹ Yet while CA did not propagate a superficial or undifferentiated view of neutrality, of its decision-making criteria or of the actual effect of its aid programmes, a structural tension remained between the claims to neutral humanitarianism and the reality of political involvement. Conflicts with the charity commissioners and with CA's own domestic constituency were reflective of this deeper structural problem that went to the heart of CA's role in developmental and humanitarian interventions.

This chapter has provided a historical understanding of CA and its capabilities over 50 years. While CA's role has clearly evolved, the analysis has shown how

¹³⁹ CA News (CA: London, July/September 1990)

¹⁴⁰ CA, 'Year Report' (April 1982-March 1983), (SOAS.CA/J/1)

¹⁴¹ Paul Renshaw, 'Ethiopia, CA and the media: considerations for the formulation of a policy' (25 March 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.318)

institutional and ideological structures have continued to impact on that role. In particular, CA has struggled to clarify its message. The focus now turns to Ethiopia and an analysis of CA's message and role within a specific policy environment.

Table 1.2 Christian Aid: Major Sources of Income (£) 1970-79

	Year ended 30 September 1971	Year ended 30 September 1972	Year ended 30 September 1973	Year ended 30 September 1974	Year ended 30 September 1975	Year to 30 September 1976	6 months to 31 March 1977	Year to 31 Mar 1978	Year to 31 March 1979
Christian Aid Week	1,429,788	1,611,802	1,830,282	1,951,931	2,474,837	2,590,895	0,109,141	2,607,185	3,022,767
Christmas Appeal	0,343,009	0,386,645	0,356,748	0,437,186	0,621,389	0,660,553	0,568,659	0,675,762	0,618,373
Denominational Appeals	0,160,227	0,149,920	0,122,670	0,135,766	0,187,575	0,183,921	0,100,600	0,190,950	0,163,331
Special Appeals*	0,257,302	0,303,385	0,189,517	0,330,853	0,062,048	0,028,970	0,004,450	0,015,591	0,037,400
Disaster Emergency Committee Appeals	0,547,648	0,005,272	0,067,737	0,274,638	0,064,294	0,231,099	-	0,135,000	0,006,726
Legacies				0,176,620	0,189,645	0,362,199	0,206,104	0,305,972	0,453,161
Government Grants				-	-	0,010,000	0,027,551	0,115,618	0,439,789
General Income	0,331,095	0,428,272	0,553,090	0,478,607	0,607,147	0,690,273	0,311,459	0,648,321	0,768,170
TOTAL INCOME	3,096,069	2,885,296	3,120,044	3,785,601	4,206,935	4,757,910	1,327,964	4,694,399	5,509,717

Source: CA financial statements and reports 1970-79

* Special Appeals include all donations sent direct to CA in response to emergencies e.g. 1971-72 Ethiopia drought

Table 1.3 Christian Aid: Analysis of Project Expenditure (£) 1970-79

Category	Year ending 30 September 1971		Year ending 30 September 1972		Year ending 30 September 1973		Year ending 30 September 1974	
	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%
Development	1,141,128	42.5	1,279,901	52.2	1,578,596	59.2	1,666,786	54.4
Refugees	0,196,180	7.3	0,244,185	10.0	0,223,516	8.4	0,202,565	6.6
Emergencies	0,993,910	37.0	0,523,220	21.4	0,436,267	16.4	0,727,395	23.7
Inter-church aid	0,059,960	2.2	0,085,678	3.5	0,078,940	3.0	0,084,511	2.8
World Council of Churches Programmes	0,154,950	5.8	0,155,900	6.4	0,130,865	4.9	0,154,350	5
Race Relations	0,046,512	1.7	0,051,425	2.1	0,051,039	1.9	0,059,950	2
Overseas Students	0,019,470	0.7	0,030,420	1.6	0,038,706	1.4	0,050,334	1.6
Misc.	0,007,216	0.3	0,002,510	0.1	0,003,300	0.2	0,000,500	
Development Education in UK	0,066,550	2.5	0,077,250	3.1	0,123,546	4.6	0,118,596	3.9
TOTAL	2,685,876	100.0	2,450,489	100.0	2,664,775	100.0	3,064,987	100

Category	Year to 30 September 1976		6 months to 31 March 1977		Year to 31 March 1978		Year to 31 March 1979	
	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%
Development	3,479,998	71.4	0,899,775	64.5	2,275,846	66.2	2,977,527	63.3
Refugees	0,311,629	6.4	0,012,923	1.0	0,214,419	6.2	0,430,183	9.1
Emergencies	0,387,108	8.0	0,248,396	18.0	0,250,198	7.3	0,491,686	10.5
Inter-Church Aid	0,191,443	3.9	0,026,059	2.0	0,195,927	5.7	0,152,216	3.2
WCC Programmes	0,226,250	4.6	0,004,538	0.3	0,181,297	5.3	0,197,500	4.2
Race Relations	0,080,575	1.7	0,043,818	3.2	0,081,250	2.4	0,115,000	2.4
Overseas Students	0,056,121	1.1	0,085,109	6.0	0,140,762	4.1	0,220,000	4.7
Misc.	0,000,500	0.0	0,007,917	1.0	0,003,050	0.1	0,010,200	0.2
Development Education in UK	0,140,574	2.9	0,055,498	4.0	0,096,357	2.7	0,111,194	2.4
TOTAL	4,874,198	100.0	1,420,033	100.0	3,439,106	100	4,705,506	100

Source: CA financial statements and reports 1970-79

Table 1.4 Christian Aid: Major Sources of Income (£) 1980-89

	Year to 31 March 1980	Year to 31 March 1981	Year to 31 March 1982	Year to 31 March 1983	Year to 31 March 1984	Year to 31 March 1985	Year to 31 March 1986	Year to 31 March 1987	Year to March 1988	Year to March 1989
Christian Aid Week	3,214,781	3,723,870	3,880,239	4,003,078	4,568,993	4,869,280	5,684,929	5,857,852	6,003,000	6,247,794
Christmas Appeal	842,598	946,054	400,027	420,488	555,685	698,192	703,305	510,599	476,000	590,820
Harvest Appeal			54,280	79,656	91,533	101,889	96,980	111,534	90,000	86,201
Denominational Appeals	170,463	203,978	285,997	277,566	364,652	916,233	585,127	647,032	774,000	476,206
Special Appeals	791,663	730,785	254,210	418,288	638,654	3,624,031	807,610	1,012,424	2,575,000	2,078,375
Disaster Emergency Committee Appeals	394,539	1,125,866	2,368	280,826	388,179	2,948,206	550,073	18,935		2,133,295
Covenants			598,771	747,756	896,185	1,325,129	1,400,563	1,857,737	1,963,000	2,060,162
Legacies	408,344	593,619	572,296	783,967	1,048,565	1,298,836	1,115,601	1,337,934	1,802,000	2,012,635
Government Grants to project	462,227	403,142	369,775	589,119	862,889	2,176,700	3,242,351	2,797,186	5,583,000	8,090,849
Donations at other times	586,252	750,000	1,107,473	1,302,440	1,391,916	1,592,593	1,983,242	2,026,191	2,121,000	2,770,885
Other Income	340,791	430,000	428,247	369,393	360,545	805,622	997,435	820,928	1,187,000	1,572,050
TOTAL	7,211,658	8,926,763	7,953,683	9,272,577	11,167,796	20,356,711	17,167,216	16,998,352	22,574,000	28,119,272

Source: CA financial statements and reports 1980-87

Table 1.5 Christian Aid: Analysis of Project Expenditure (£) 1980-89

	Year to 31 March 1980		Year to 31 March 1981		Year to 31 March 1982		Year to 31 March 1983		Year to 31 March 1984	
	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%
Development	3,215,695	57	3,815,940	57.2	4,719,088	62.7	4,308,516	61.3	5,536,491	54.2
Refugees	0,422,277	7.5	0,974,366	15	0,501,391	6.7	0,334,641	4.8	1,633,391	16.2
Emergencies	1,132,763	20	0,945,903	14.2	1,003,617	13.3	1,004,666	14.3	1,253,747	13
Inter-Church Aid	0,233,444	4.1	0,191,551	2.9	0,206,930	2.7	0,243,947	3.5	0,199,007	2
WCC Programmes	0,175,000	3.1	0,175,000	2.2	0,165,000	2.2	0,165,000	2.3	0,330,000	3.3
Race Relations	0,063,500	1.1	0,077,500	1.2	0,086,000	1.1	0,092,000	1.3	0,123,000	1.2
Overseas Students	0,230,000	4.1	0,290,002	4.3	0,311,125	4.1	0,396,301	5.5	0,443,537	4.4
Development Education in UK	0,174,105	3.1	0,202,194	3	0,534,123	7.2	0,485,254	7	0,579,861	5.7
Miscellaneous	0,006,300									
TOTAL	5,653,084	100.0	6,672,456	100.0	7,527,274	100.0	7,030,325	100.0	10,099,034	100.0

	Year to 31 March 1985		Year to 31 March 1986		Year to March 1987		Year to March 1988		Year to March 1989	
	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%
Development	8,322,135	47.8	9,021,526	60.7	7,763,001	57.5	9,873,000	55.8	11,626,322	52
Refugees	1,942,867	11.2	1,125,592	7.8	1,096,608	8.1	1,746,000	9.9	1,303,108	5.8
Emergencies	5,350,649	30.7	2,832,636	19	1,995,882	14.8	2,900,000	16.4	5,897,911	26.3
Inter-Church Aid	0,320,104	1.8	0,105,113	0.8	0,133,989	1			0,108,787	0.5
WCC Programmes	0,165,000	0.9	0,165,000		0,165,000	1.2			0,170,000	0.8
Church-related programmes							0,289,000	1.6		
Race Relations	0,120,000	0.8	0,120,000	1.2	0,060,000	0.4	0,132,000	0.7	0,142,000	0.5
Overseas Students	0,417,925	2.4	0,403,349	2.9	0,429,835	3.2	0,797,000	4.5	0,912,780	4.1
Development Education in UK	0,755,262	4.4	1,096,698	7.5	1,847,587	13.8	1,966,000	11.1	2,211,591	10
TOTAL	17,393,942	100.0	14,869,914	100.0	13,491,902	100.0	17,703,000	100.0	22,372,499	100.0

Source: CA financial statements and reports 1980-90

Chapter 2

CHRISTIAN AID, FAMINE, RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Chapter 1 argued that, throughout its history, CA had difficulty finding a voice. Part of the problem lay in specific structural contradictions within CA. The other part lay in CA having to respond to a changing theoretical environment. This chapter looks at the relevance of theories of famine, relief and development to CA's experience. It explores the paradigm shifts in relief and development policy over the past 30 years and their implication for how agencies, like CA, positioned themselves.

One issue that emerges is that different theories of famine, relief and development can lead to the dominance of particular kinds of institutional practice and the prioritisation of particular kinds of knowledge at the expense of other modes of understanding and action. For Foucault, the discursive construction of a subject as an object of knowledge and the institutional practices that emerged in relation to this knowledge was a key concern. As a result discourse was seen to produce real power effects. This chapter uses Foucault as a tool of analysis in order to explore changing patterns of power in relief and development.

In its organisational growth, CA moved away from crisis intervention, in natural and man-made disasters, to longer-term development work, in the belief that political and environmental stability could best be achieved through sustainable development. Yet, despite its wish to be involved in sustainable development, CA continually found itself predominantly tied up with famine and disaster relief - Biafra 1967, the Sahel and Ethiopia in the mid-1970s, Ethiopia and Sudan in the mid-1980s, Somalia and Rwanda in the early 1990s. Much of the policy debate within the organisation has been about how to move from famine and relief to sustainable development. As a prelude to an analysis of CA's performance in Ethiopia, this chapter looks at the three components of this continuum in turn, exploring how theory has impinged on CA. My concern is not with a critique of theory but with an understanding of how and why agencies, like CA, have positioned themselves as they have.

1. Conceptions of Famine: understanding its nature and causes

Famine has been an important policy issue for CA and a major concern in Ethiopia. As we shall see in chapters 3, 4, and 5, CA experienced various problems operating in such a policy environment. To a large extent such problems derived from the organisation's perception of famine and change in Africa. The chapters will show how CA was weak on theory and definition and how this, in the 1971-75 Ethiopian famine particularly, affected its capabilities. This section argues that sound definition and theorisation of famine are crucial not because of semantics but because the discursive construction of the idea of a 'famine disaster' has important functions and power effects, providing the criteria and timing on which relief resources are released or withheld and determining the nature of the relief required, be it food aid, medicine, political or military intervention. It explores the evolution of famine theory and its relevance to CA's actions in Ethiopia.

Famines have been routinely depicted in analyses over the past 30 years as temporary 'disasters'; their primary cause being inadequate food supply, whether arising from bad weather, inappropriate agricultural practices, or population growth; and their essential nature being mass starvation. Such 'supply-side' explanations of famine have been labeled 'food availability decline' or FAD theories and have been frequently applied to African famines.¹ Yet FAD theories have several major weaknesses. In the first place they discuss only supply factors, but shortages can occur for either supply or demand reasons as when real purchasing power declines due to an increase in food prices or a fall in individual incomes, either of which can produce famine in a situation of unchanged or even rising aggregate food availability. Second, even in the case of famines which are characterized by reductions in per capita food availability, FAD theories 'says little about who is dying, where they are dying and why.'² It ignores, 'the distributional effects of food supply shocks, which translate into

¹ See Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famine: an essay on entitlement and deprivation* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1981)

² R. Bush, 'Briefings: "drought and famines"' *Review of African Political Economy*, 33 (August 1985), p. 61

starvation for the poor but allow the wealthy to survive (and even prosper).³ Thirdly FAD theories explain only a production disruption and are unable to explain why a local food deficit is not offset by inflows of food from surplus regions elsewhere, through the agency of traders, governments or relief organisations. Essentially FAD explanations fail to go into the relationship of people to food.⁴ They say nothing about poverty or inequality and allow for no differentiation of vulnerability. Finally, supply-side theories of famine typically concentrate on the precipitating factors or triggers of famine - droughts, floods - but say little about the processes that set people up for natural disasters:

‘to consider famines simply as natural disasters manifests a fatalistic tendency to place the whole responsibility upon nature when in fact society itself, by the manner in which it exercises control over natural resources and access to food supplies, is a prime contributor.’⁵

Drought, on its own, fails to explain why particular groups of people become vulnerable to famine.⁶ Most importantly, emphasizing drought as the prime causal determinant portrays famine as ‘nobody’s fault’ and obscures political responsibility for timely intervention:

‘what begs for explanation is the period between the time when drought is recognised and the commencement of the period of starvation. It is this period of waiting passively that allows the process of famine to develop to its full capacity of destruction.’⁷

It was Amartya Sen’s seminal work in 1981, *Poverty and Famines*, which offered the first comprehensive departure from conventional food supply theories, challenging the view that decline in food availability was either a necessary or a sufficient cause of famine.⁸ The most important feature of Sen’s approach was that it directed attention away from supply-side explanations of food crises, towards an

³ Stephen Devereux, *Theories of Famine* (Harvester Wheatsheaf: Hemel Hempstead, 1993), p. 26

⁴ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, p. 154

⁵ UNRISD, *Famine risk and famine prevention in the modern world* (UNRISD: Geneva, June 1976), p. 1 cited in Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, p. 40

⁶ See Mesfin Wolde Mariam, *Rural Vulnerability to Famine in Ethiopia, 1958-77* (Intermediate Technology Publications: London, 1986), pp. 121-143; Africa Watch, *Evil Days: 30 years of war and famine in Ethiopia* (Human Rights Watch: New York, 1991), pp. 133-134

⁷ Wolde Mariam, *Rural Vulnerability*, pp. 127-9

⁸ Sen readily conceded that food availability decline could contribute to famine, and that it did in the Sahelian famine of 1969-73. His point was to show that there was no necessary connection between the two. Sen, *Poverty and Famines*

analysis which treated such crises as symptoms of demand failure:

‘Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many possible causes.’⁹

Sen argued that the roots of famine lay in reduced individual ‘entitlements’ to food which rendered rural populations impoverished and vulnerable to climatic shocks which would otherwise have caused no undue distress. Sen’s work on entitlements linked famine to poverty: ‘the food problem is not concerned just with the availability of food but with the disposition of food.’¹⁰ Essentially he drew a distinction between aggregate availability or supply of food, and an individual’s access to or ownership of food. The entitlement approach also explained why food could actually be exported from areas where people were starving:

‘frequently food does move out of famine areas when the loss of entitlement is more powerful than the decline - if any - of food supply, and such food-counter-movement has been observed in famines as diverse as the Irish famines of the 1840s, the Ethiopian famine in Wollo of 1973 and the Bangladesh famine of 1974.’¹¹

However, while Sen’s analysis represented a critical step forward in the study of causal factors, it shared important characteristics with the one he was rejecting and the idea of ‘famine’ itself implicit in his works still ran along conventional lines. As Keen observed:

‘... in his [Sen’s] analysis, there were victims of famine, but few immediate culprits or beneficiaries. Indeed, “market forces” had in some sense taken over from previous non-human actors (God, the weather) as the principal author of famine: the lives of men and women were still depicted as being at the mercy of Supply and Demand. Famine was still a “disaster”; in Sen’s conception, it was now an “economic disaster”.’¹²

Such limitations were also evident in Sen’s second account of famine promoted alongside his analysis of ‘entitlements’. This account put liberal civil and political rights at the center of famine prevention:

‘The diverse political freedoms that are available in a democratic state, including regular elections, free newspapers and freedom of speech, must be seen as the real force behind the elimination of famines. Here again, it appears that one set

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 1

¹⁰ Amartya Sen, ‘The food problem: theory and policy’ *Third World Quarterly*, 4 (July 1982), p. 459

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 456

¹² Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*, p. 5

of freedoms - to criticize, publish and vote - are usually linked with other types of freedoms, such as the freedom to escape starvation and famine mortality.¹³

The hypothesised association between civil and political liberties and protection from famine was persuasively and most notably supported by examples from India.¹⁴

However while the account argued that particular types of state (lacking democratic forms of government or a free press) were likely to be particularly neglectful of famine relief, the possibility that states and politically powerful groups would actively promote famine and actively obstruct relief for rational purposes of their own was not addressed. Famine was still construed as an event - in this instance a failure of public policy - and not a process. In effect, the issue of the creation of famine was ignored.

An alternative perspective to that of Sen was provided by Amrita Rangasami who challenged Sen's analysis on two grounds. Firstly Rangasami suggested that: 'the famine process cannot be defined with reference to the victims of famine alone. It is a process in which benefits accrue to one section of the community while losses flow to the other.'¹⁵ Secondly, Rangasami challenged Sen's notion that famine necessarily involved mortality, stressing that famine may, but need not culminate in mortality. Drawing from local understandings of famine, Rangasami argued that famine was a 'politico-socio-economic process' and that 'mortality can be retarded or halted, due to state intervention or other reasons.'¹⁶ A similar critique came from Alex de Waal. His work in Darfur, Sudan, highlighted the fact that famine was a crisis of the entire livelihood of people and not just an individual biological crisis. In this respect, famine and mortality were distinct, there were 'famines' and 'famines that kill': 'when people are dying, manifestly because of the hardship and disorder associated with a famine, it

¹³ Amartya Sen, 'Individual Freedom as a social commitment' *New York Review of Books*, (14 June 1990)

¹⁴ The establishment of Famine Codes in India in the late nineteenth century has been seen as crucial to India's success in fighting famine. However De Waal has argued that the links between respect for civil and political rights and protection from famine are far more complex, and the fact that mass famine has largely been eradicated in India is explained not simply by the advent of democracy, but also by the fact that the legitimacy of post-independence governments has depended explicitly on preventing famine; other social evils, not being a threat to political legitimacy, have remained. De Waal, 'Social contract', pp. 194-205

¹⁵ Rangasami, 'Failure of exchange entitlements' p. 1748

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1748

is a "famine that kills".¹⁷ Moreover, as De Waal went on to argue, most famine mortality was not directly related to undernutrition but was caused by outbreaks of disease.¹⁸ The crisis was one of health, typically caused by social disorder, and not one of lowered food consumption.

The definitions of famine provided by such scholars as De Waal and Rangasami recognised that famines had social and political dimensions, distinct from their nutritional manifestation. This broader concept of the famine process was developed further by David Keen in *The Benefits of Famine*.¹⁹ Keen argued that as an extended economic and political process, famine needed a new political-economy theorisation to take account of functions as well as causes. He added a political dimension to previous economic analyses of food insecurity, vulnerability and famine. In analysing the causes of famine among the Dinka of Sudan's Bahr el Ghazal region, Keen argued that, rather than poverty, it was their 'natural wealth' in livestock that made the Dinka vulnerable to raiding from northern Baggara tribes.²⁰ The vulnerability of the Dinka arose from their political powerlessness - they had been excluded since the mid-1970s from participation in government - not from their poverty. This indicated that the implicit assumption of entitlement theory that it was the poor who become malnourished and died in famines needed to be treated with caution.²¹

From the mid-1980s, with the resurgence of conflict-famines in Africa (in particular, Ethiopia and Sudan), theories of famine increasingly reflected a political-economy approach and an analysis of power.²² And if famine represented an extended economic and political process in which benefits accrued to one section of the community while losses flowed to the other, some scholars felt that it was possible in

¹⁷ De Waal, *Famine that Kills*, p. 76

¹⁸ Alex de Waal, 'A re-assessment of entitlement theory in the light of the recent famines in Africa' *Development and Change*, 21 (1990), p. 481

¹⁹ Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 92

²¹ Work on famine in Somalia in the 1990s, has shown that the groups most affected by the famine were those that owned the most productive agricultural land. Alex de Waal, 'War and famine in Africa' *IDS Bulletin*, 24 (October 1993), pp. 38-40

²² See Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*; Duffield, 'NGOs, disaster relief and asset transfer in the Horn', pp. 131-157; P. V. Cutler, 'The development of the 1983-5 famine in northern Ethiopia' (PhD thesis: London University, 1988)

certain circumstances that 'the groups benefiting from famine are likely to have an interest in preventing effective relief.'²³ Peter Cutler argued that policy choices about famine control were dictated almost exclusively by political considerations and that while well-informed individuals might have been able to identify famine risk, they might not always have been able to persuade key decision-makers within aid institutions to act to prevent famine.²⁴ Or as Keen observed:

'when famine occurs, we may hear a great deal about "market failure" and "policy failure". But who exactly is failing (and who succeeding) when markets behave in particular ways, or when the expressed policy of relieving famine does not work out in practice?'²⁵

Even as policy-makers 'failed' to achieve stated goals (famine prevention), it was possible that they might be achieving other, unstated goals (settlement of pastoralists, undermining political opponents etc.). Duffield wrote:

'the conventional approach [to famine] neglects the question of power and whether famine can be the result of its conscious exercise in pursuit of gain or advantage. ... From a political perspective, not only is it unnecessary for famine to be natural or the result of market failure, it need not even be temporary if its continuation is advantageous to the powerful.'²⁶

The above analysis implies that different kinds of knowledge about famine have existed, typically reflecting the differing perceptions of the 'outsider' and the 'insider', the Western academic or humanitarian and the people who actually suffered. Conventional 'outsider' definitions of famine, adopting a Malthusian logic²⁷, tended to stress food shortage, severe hunger and excess mortality. In contrast, recent research has suggested that famine victims in Africa and Asia saw famine more as a problem of

²³ Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*, p. 7

²⁴ Peter Cutler, 'Responses to famine: why they are allowed to happen' in John Osgood Field (ed.), *The Challenge of Famine: recent experience, lessons learned* (Kumarian Press: West Hartford, Connecticut, 1993), p. 74

²⁵ Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*, pp. 11-12

²⁶ Duffield, 'NGOs, disaster relief and asset transfer in the Horn', p. 143

²⁷ Thomas Malthus' theory of demographic dynamics was perhaps the first coherent theory of famine causation to be advanced. Malthus's theory was based upon a simple arithmetic principle; that population increases geometrically while food production can only increase by arithmetic progression. If voluntary restraint in reproduction fails, he argued that population would inevitably outstrip the quantity of food available in a region or country. At that point 'gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world.' Thus famine was identified as an absolute shortfall in the supply of food in a given area and, simultaneously, as the death by starvation of a substantial proportion of the inhabitants. Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (Macmillans: London, 1798)

destitution, not just starvation and as a continuation of normal processes, not a unique event.²⁸ As we shall see in chapter 3, CA's experience of famine in Ethiopia in the mid-1970s related directly to such debates. At that time, CA adopted a conventional supply-side explanation of famine. Lacking an analysis of processes of impoverishment and vulnerability, CA took too long to recognise that the famine was about politics: there was no noticeable food availability decline for Ethiopia as a whole in the worst famine year of 1973 but local shortages linked to the erosion of rural production systems of certain groups; local food deficits were not offset by inflows of food from surplus regions elsewhere, either through the agency of traders, governments or relief organisations; the Ethiopian government hid the famine until it had developed to its full capacity of destruction; and the vulnerability of the Afar pastoralists and Ogaden herdsmen, the worst-hit victims of the famine, arose from their political powerlessness and not from their poverty.²⁹ In contrast, in the 1983-85 famine, events gave rise to a different approach by CA and a political-economy analysis of the crisis. This will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5. And yet, as can be clearly seen in the development discourse, discussed in chapter 6, that emerged from the 1983-5 crisis, robust theorisation of famine remained notably absent.

2. Disaster Relief: the difficulties and effects of responding to crisis³⁰

CA experienced various operational problems in responding to famine in Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s. As will be shown in chapters 3, 4 and 5, these included: the ability to define the relief problem and to move beyond government definitions of when and where relief distributions were acceptable and possible; the ability to monitor the delivery of relief or to ensure it reached the intended beneficiaries; the ability to address the underlying causes of famine; and the ability as a fund-raising

²⁸ De Waal, *Famine that Kills*, p. 141

²⁹ See chapter 3 below

³⁰ The following focuses on the management of famine episodes. This is not intended to imply any exceptionality from other disasters - earthquakes, floods and typhoons - but simply reflects the concern of this study and the relevance of famine to CA's experiences in Ethiopia.

NGO to combine a neutral charitable image with a commitment to the principles of justice, human rights, conflict resolution and advocacy implicit in a social justice mandate. This section looks at the difficulties of responding to crisis and how CA's experience relates to theories of disaster relief. One issue that emerges is how the dominance of a particular discourse on famine determines the prioritisation of certain kinds of institutional practices and how in the process, a number of local power effects are produced. The construction of a particular knowledge enables famine to be detached from its historically specific and locally based economic and political processes. This detachment means that famine can be established as a subject of scientific knowledge, the content of which need not necessarily refer to these processes in order to be understood. Nor do the institutional practices applied to famine need necessarily relate to these processes in order to establish their legitimacy. As one analyst observed, 'historically specific and locally based processes of famine can be "bracketed out", without fundamentally compromising the validity of a relief operation, whose humanitarian goals remain intact.'³¹ Using a Foucaultian analysis, this section explores how and why this happens and its implication for agencies like CA.

2.1 *The theoretical setting*

Despite the shifts in famine theorisation highlighted above, the idea of famine as an event has remained predominant in the 'official discourse' of the aid community. Typically, it was the fact of famine's occurrence, and particularly its biological manifestations, to which institutional attention was overwhelming directed. Consequently, despite the wide diversity of situations in which famines have occurred, relief interventions have tended to exhibit a remarkable uniformity of approach, in terms of the timing and orientation of the response. The result, in the words of one observer, has been 'a curious, one might say almost pathological discontinuity between an intense emotional commitment to a particularly dramatic symptom and a continuing neglect of

³¹ Hendrie, 'Knowledge and power', p. 63

the chronic disease of which the symptom is part.'³² This discontinuity has three main characteristics.

Firstly, the tendency among major donors to equate famine with mass mortality. This has had important implications for the timing of relief. As Keen argued in his description of the relief operation in south-western Sudan, 'a focus on famine as starvation helped legitimise late interventions and confines relief to a stage when loss of assets has already progressed very far'.³³ If famine was identified as mass mortality, the focus inevitably became one of responding to a measurable emergency once it had been allowed to happen, rather than preventing it. Secondly, an overriding concern with nutritional status. This has had important implications for targeting relief as nutritional status is typically used as the main criteria for intervention: anthropometric status of individual children is used as admission criteria for supplementary and therapeutic feeding programmes; and population surveys of child anthropometric status, in combination with other indicators, are often used to target food aid at geographical areas or population groups.³⁴ Yet targeting interventions at the malnourished assumed that malnutrition was a good indicator of mortality risk. Case studies have suggested that there was no simple relationship between undernutrition and mortality and that starvation might not always be the problem.³⁵ De Waal has developed an account of famine whereby mortality was linked to social disruption and the breakdown of people's coping strategies.³⁶ It was this disruption, characterised by migration and ultimately over-crowding in relief camps that created a health crisis and hence mortality - research in drought affected areas of Wollo, Shewa and Sidamo in Ethiopia in 1985 found that there was 'a higher prevalence of communicable diseases among famine

³² Charles Elliott, *Comfortable Compassion? Poverty, Power and the Church* (Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1987), p.10

³³ Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*, p. 236

³⁴ Susanne Jaspars & Helen Young, 'Malnutrition and poverty in the early stages of famine: North Darfur, 1988-90' *Disasters*, 19 (1995), p. 198

³⁵ In Darfur, 1984-85, 'starvation was not the problem: it was a greater incidence of familiar diseases such as diarrhea, measles, and malaria'. De Waal, 'A re-assessment of entitlement theory', p. 481

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 483-488

victims in shelters than in normal population.³⁷ Thus nutritional deficit was not necessarily a good criteria for targeting³⁸, and by giving legitimacy to the creation of emergency relief camps - and intensifying exposure to disease in a degraded public health environment - might actually have a negative impact. De Waal's social disruption analysis in which it was the process whereby coping strategies are undermined that lead to famine, suggested an alternative model for targeting intervention in the earlier social stages of famine rather than simply at its physical symptoms.³⁹ Thirdly, a tendency among major donor's to see mass migration as an indicator of famine. Again this has had implications for the timing of relief as such migration occurred at the terminal phase of famine, representing the final stages of social breakdown, the point of surrender in the attempt to maintain a household unit.⁴⁰ It was also the stage at which large numbers, particularly women and children, flood into the degraded disease environment of relief camps, and die (see above). By focusing on this final phase, the need for interventions earlier are eschewed and the whole dimension of famine as a collective experience which poses a threat not only to lives, but more importantly to livelihoods is ignored.

The donor's tendency to focus on the physical state of the population - nutrition, migration - has meant that the specificity of the context of famine and the means by which it progresses, have received far less attention. In this respect the social and political dimensions of famine have been ignored. At the operational level the impact has been crucial. Firstly, the apolitical model of relief typically employed by major donors and NGOs has failed to acknowledge the problem of defining the relief problem and monitoring its implementation. Keen has argued that:

'those who wish to prevent famine need to face up to the major problems involved in targeting needy groups who lack political muscle within their own

³⁷ Adugna Getahun, 'Aspects of health and famine' in A. Penrose (ed.) *Beyond the Famine: an examination of the issues behind famine in Ethiopia* (International Institute for Relief and Development and Food for the Hungry International: Geneva, 1988), p. 152

³⁸ The problems with nutritional surveillance and targeting have been analysed by De Waal who has argued that 'nutritional deficit' can take precedence over excess deaths as a criterion of famine: 'for instance, during 1974 in the Ethiopian Ogaden, investigators found high levels of excess child mortality but near-normal levels of nutrition, and decided that there was currently no famine.' De Waal, *Famine that Kills*, p. 31

³⁹ See De Waal, 'A re-assessment of entitlement theory', pp. 483-488

⁴⁰ Dessalegn Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies* (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies: Uppsala, 1991), pp. 156-161

societies. More often than not, it is the political weakness of victim groups that has exposed them to famine the first place.'⁴¹

A government of a country threatened by famine may respond to that threat with different degrees of enthusiasm, depending upon the political and strategic importance of the population at risk. As Cutler argued, remoter rural people have rarely constituted a threat to the established order, so they have been of little direct interest. As a result, in Ethiopia, 'the Ethiopian state has traditionally ignored rural famine and has done so with impunity'.⁴² As will be shown in chapter 4, this proved an important issue in CA's ability to respond to the 1971-75 Ethiopian famine effectively. Examples of biases in food distribution have also been found. During the 1983-85 famine in Ethiopia, reports of fieldworkers and journalists indicated that food aid was allocated by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission in ways that supported the political objectives of government.⁴³ Again, CA came up against this difficulty and found it necessary to make policy choices accordingly, effectively channeling aid through alternative routes.⁴⁴

Secondly, conventional discourses on famine and relief have failed to address the underlying causes of famine and may, in certain circumstances, have supported processes of famine. They have failed to take account of the political and economic processes creating famine⁴⁵; of the possibility that a variety of relatively powerful groups might have an interest in promoting and sustaining processes of famine; and consequently of the importance of 'who' relief interventions have supported. Donors' tendency to focus on famine the 'event' has played all too easily into the hands of local groups manipulating famine for their own purposes. In this context, interventions may not only have failed to address the problem but may actually have become part of the problem. Keen's exposition of the process of famine creation and maintenance in south-

⁴¹ Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*, p. 232

⁴² Cutler, 'Responses to famine' in Field (ed.), *The Challenge of Famine*, p. 75

⁴³ J. W. Clay and B. K. Holcomb, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine: 1984-1985* (Cultural Survival: Cambridge, MA, 1985) cited in Cutler, 'Responses to famine', p. 77

⁴⁴ See chapters 5 and 6 below

⁴⁵ Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*; & Duffield, 'NGOs, disaster relief and asset transfer in the Horn', pp. 131-157

western Sudan explained how conflict was sustained by efforts to control and co-opt efforts to relieve the famine.⁴⁶ His warning was clear:

‘if donors do not address themselves to the underlying processes creating famine and to the local power structures that shape famine and famine relief, their interventions may actually reinforce these power structures, deepen inequalities, and exacerbate famine.’⁴⁷

This issue was particularly relevant to CA’s experience of famine in Ethiopia the 1970s and 1980s. In both instances famine was caused and maintained by political and economic processes implemented by the Ethiopian government. The different policy that CA pursued in the 1980s, compared to the 1970s - about ‘who’ to support - reflected changes in the organisation’s theoretical framework and will be dealt with in chapter 3 and chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

Thirdly, conventional discourse on famine has ignored the politics of relief and implied a neutrality marred by reality. Chapters 4 and 5 below, show that in the choices made by CA, during the 1983-85 famine in Ethiopia, to work alongside the Tigrayan and Eritrean liberation movements, CA provided relief, foreign exchange and legitimacy to combatants. The apolitical model of relief implicit in conventional discourse presented humanitarianism as a neutral endeavour. As a result a genuine commitment to resolve the situation, complete with all its ambiguities, politics and confusions has been eschewed. In the process, NGOs, like CA, as shown in chapters 4 and 5, have been left to operate subject to an uncertain and problematic set of rules, and have been restricted by the need to present a neutral, charitable, fund-raising profile in a situation demanding an involved, political and advocacy role.

The above analysis implies that as long as famine is simply identified with starving to death, the idea that famine relief needs to be anything more than neutral, technical, non-participatory and externally managed has been hard to credit. Appropriate questions in this perspective have concerned ‘needs’ and ‘numbers’; disaster relief is discussed predominantly in narrow terms of resource deficits; and humanitarianism is

⁴⁶ David Keen, ‘The functions of famine in Southwestern Sudan: implications for relief’ in Joanna Macrae & Anthony Zwi (eds.), *War and Hunger: rethinking international responses to complex emergencies* (Zed Books in association with SCF (UK): London, 1994), pp. 111-124

⁴⁷ Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*, p. 235

cast as apolitical. It should however be clear from the above discussion that such a model is flawed both empirically and strategically. It has been shown how the evolving debates about disaster relief, its nature and effects, were relevant to CA's experience in Ethiopia. Certainly by the 1980s, CA's intervention differed significantly from that of 1970s, when, as shown in chapter 3, the focus was on the biological crisis and policy orientated towards targeting relief camps. By the 1983-85 famine, CA's intervention, discussed in chapters 4 and 5, was characterised by a political-economy discourse and targeted at supporting local processes of survival. Most significantly, CA's changing response to famine in the 1970s and 1980s, relate to the notions of power in disaster relief theorisation and reflect the changing theoretical framework. In the 1971-75 famine, as discussed in chapter 3, CA adopted a conventional relief approach which tended to reinforce the power structures that underlay the famine. In 1983-85, discussed in chapters 4 and 5, CA adopted a radically different approach characterised by solidarity and a political commitment to address the underlying causes of the crisis.

2.2 The institutional setting

In both the 1971-75 and 1983-85 famines in Ethiopia, despite CA's evolving position, patterns of empowerment and CA's ability to pursue a social justice mandate continued to be affected by various structural difficulties that determined how discourse was constructed and presented to its supporters. This section looks at the institutional setting for theories of disaster relief.

There are four main influences that determine the construction of discourse and institutional behaviour of NGOs, like CA and contribute to their difficulties in responding to relief. Firstly, the institutional imperative of producing concrete and visible results. In this respect, at an individual agency level, a focus on famine as a nutritional emergency corresponds to that agency's operational capabilities. The disaster is 'do-able' and the intervention is targeted at improving the physical state of the affected population through the application of a range of universal technologies: identifying vulnerable groups; getting food aid to those in greatest need; monitoring nutritional status. Conversely, the local knowledge of the famine based on its social,

rather than physical manifestations presents a complexity that is less programmable. Conflict-famines in particular present enormous operational problems, both ideologically, in terms of accountability and involvement and structurally, in terms of access and safety. Discourses on famine reflect agencies' concerns, those in turn reflect what is perceived as 'do-able'. It should therefore come as no surprise that the logic of much conventional relief activity has derived from a 'natural disaster' theorising that pays little attention to social or political factors and has been characterised by the delivery of basic survival commodities and services. Agencies are good at provisioning supplies, they are less good at mediating within complex political processes.

Secondly, and on a much broader level, the institutional context for disaster relief has impacted on the way famine is perceived and responses are constructed. Since the early 1980s, the international relief system has undergone a process of rapid and fundamental change. A significant development has been the dramatically enhanced role played by NGOs, like CA, within the system. Increased support from private sources has been an important contributory factor to this trend, but of much greater significance has been the increased use of NGOs, as described in chapter 1, as channels for the provision of relief assistance by donor agencies.⁴⁸ The principal reasons for this shift in donor funding away from states and towards NGOs included: the poor economic performance of many developing countries, particularly in Africa, during the 1980s which weakened the capacity of state structures to act as a channel for donor aid; the comparative flexibility and speed of response shown by NGOs and their greater accountability to the donors which increased their attractiveness as an alternative channel; the political instability and numerous conflicts in areas of Africa and Asia during the 1980s which constrained the 'channeling' options available to donor agencies (political instability reduces the efficiency of government agencies and conflict introduces the risk of diversion of assistance from their intended beneficiaries by the combatants); the respect for national sovereignty, central to the United Nations Charter and the constitutions of the principal United Nations specialised agencies and

⁴⁸ Borton, 'Recent trends in the international relief system', pp. 187-201

programmes involved in humanitarian assistance, which limited their ability to provide assistance in areas of political instability and conflict where sovereignty was disputed and large areas were beyond the effective control of government agencies and which catapulted NGOs into the limelight as agencies free to ignore national borders and to act independently of host governments (constitutionally if not pragmatically).⁴⁹ Thus until 10 years ago, NGOs worked within a confined 'humanitarian space' defined by governments in their own self-interest - not a truly apolitical space but conveniently described as one; and NGOs had relatively small budgets, for all major programmes were handled by governments - in the UK, it was only in 1975 that NGOs first started receiving government funding; only in 1985 that they started receiving significant amounts of food for distribution.⁵⁰ Since the 1980s, the post-Cold War 'new world disorder' has generated a new operating environment: NGOs are playing an enhanced role in the international relief system; and increasingly this role is characterised by intervention in situations of political instability and conflict.⁵¹

An important part of this enhanced role has been the emergence of what Korten describes as 'public-service contracting' arrangements.⁵² These have typically involved a major bilateral or multilateral donor paying Northern NGOs to implement a predetermined package of assistance. The concept has been particularly well developed in conflict situations where Northern NGOs have been seen as neutral channels for humanitarian assistance without political allegiance, able to implement operations which, under international law, multilateral and bilateral agencies might not wish to support directly. From the mid-1980s, donor governments became increasingly involved in such subcontracting relations, typically in support of cross-border relief operations. By the beginning of the 1990s, the United Nations also accepted the

⁴⁹ Many Northern NGOs also feared alienating national governments and risking expulsion in order to protect their long-term development and relief interests. While not subject to the same constitutional constraints as the UN and its related agencies, many NGOs still had to consider the risk of expulsion.

⁵⁰ Alex de Waal, 'NGOs as institutions' in Royal Anthropological Institute, *International NGOs and Complex Political Emergencies: perspectives from anthropology* (RAI: London, 1995), p. 11

⁵¹ Duffield, 'Complex emergencies', pp. 37-45; & Borton, 'Recent trends in the international relief system', pp. 187-201

⁵² David C. Korten, *Getting to the 21st Century: voluntary action and the global agenda* (Kumarian Press: Connecticut, 1990), cited in Joanna Macrae & Anthony Zwi, 'Famine, complex emergencies and international policy in Africa: an overview', in Macrae & Zwi (eds.), *War and Hunger*, p. 27

necessity of working in unresolved conflict situations and a new United Nations-NGO subcontracting relationship was established: the United Nations would secure access, funds and provide coordination while NGOs would carry out the actual relief programmes.⁵³ Although heralded as a major breakthrough at the time, this kind of approach represented not so much a departure from the official discourse on famine as an adaptation of its application to complex political situations. Meanwhile, the power effects of the official discourse remained essentially intact. The 'disaster' was still an event, alienated as a subject of knowledge from its specific context, and susceptible to the application of institutional practices designed to save as many lives as possible. Indeed with the development of formal rule-based physical security and delivery systems, the de-contextualisation of the disaster had been reinforced and an accommodation with violence enhanced.⁵⁴ CA's experience in Ethiopia in the 1983-85 famine, discussed in chapters 4 and 5, lay at the centre of this historic shift of donor funding away from states and towards NGOs, and of the increasing development of donor-NGO subcontracting relations. Changing donor policy during the mid-1980s meant that the previously illicit cross-border operation into Ethiopia, supported by CA, gained de facto recognition at the expense of nation-state sovereignty. Ad hoc, donor/NGO sub-contracting relations arose. The effect of the changing institutional arrangements on discourse, were also apparent. CA was used by the British government and by the EC as a neutral channel of aid, a means by which food could be accessed to the starving. The profile of the operation was to be discrete and charitable. Yet CA itself was attempting to confront not a 'neutral' 'event' but the complex reality of internal war. The neutral disaster discourse apparent in the institutional structure of donor-NGO subcontracting thus created enormous problems for CA's ability to construct and publicise a political-economy discourse.

Thirdly, the de-contextualisation of disasters has occurred as a function of donor funding procedures. It is now commonly accepted that patterns of relief are

⁵³ This type of formal system can be seen in Operation Lifeline Sudan in 1989, Special Relief Programme for Angola 1990, and in Bosnia 1992. Duffield, 'Complex emergencies', pp. 37-45; & African Rights, *Humanitarianism Unbound?*

⁵⁴ Duffield, 'Complex emergencies', pp. 37-45; & African Rights, *Humanitarianism Unbound?*

actively shaped by the priorities and agendas of international donors and that donors are aware of the vital political role of food aid - for example the Reagan administration's delayed response to famine in Ethiopia reflected its overt anti-marxist ideology.⁵⁵ And it has been argued that:

'in the absence of a coherent and transparent international policy framework to guide intervention and distribution of resources, ad hoc decisions motivated by strategic political and institutional concerns, and even by the personal attitudes of policy-makers rather than the needs of conflict-affected populations have determined the design of emergency aid.'⁵⁶

Given the increasing dependence of NGOs, like CA, on official funding, further concern is expressed that NGOs have lost their relative independence and have become implementers of donor policy. As Joanna Macrae writes:

'the reliance of the international community on private agencies to implement disaster-relief programmes may exert pressure on Northern NGOs to refrain from publicising the conditions that have created famine and that block relief operations. It has been suggested that the role of NGOs as contractors to bilateral and multilateral agencies may serve to maintain their silence if they fear that their comments are likely to elicit sanctions.'⁵⁷

There is a danger that the independence of NGOs, like CA may become sacrificed to the wider institutional need to be seen to respond to humanitarian crises in an apparently 'neutral', apolitical way. The advocacy role of British NGOs has been further restricted by the charity commissioners' rules about how far a charity may go in 'political' campaigning. Essentially, the advocacy of work of agencies in Britain has been limited to 'apolitical' campaigning activities. The issue of an agency's ability to set the relief agenda and independence to pursue advocacy became particularly important in Ethiopia in the famine of the mid-1980s. As will be shown in chapter 5, it was an issue that CA was never able to resolve.

Fourthly the functional effects of media representation have impacted on the way discourses on famine and relief are constructed. Concerns have been expressed about the media dependency of agencies such as CA and the role and power of the media in setting the discourse on famine and relief. At its crudest, it can be said that

⁵⁵ Jack Shepherd, "'Some tragic errors': American policy and the Ethiopian famine, 1981-85' in Field (ed.), *The Challenge of Famine*, p. 99

⁵⁶ Macrae & Zwi, 'Famine, complex emergencies and international policy in Africa', p. 26

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 28

'disasters do not exist - except for their unfortunate victims and those who suffer in their aftermath's - unless publicized by the media. In this sense the media actually construct disasters.'⁵⁸ By extension, relief is also constructed by the media;

Governments and national relief agencies come under intense pressure to respond to those emergencies which are in the public eye; and a major concern becomes to be seen to be doing something, even if the capacity to act effectively is not there. Torn between the institutional need to gain media coverage and raise funds - dependent on such coverage - NGOs join the rabble. Critics argue with particular reference to conflict-famines, that the result is often more about appeasing the sensibilities of northern constituencies than tackling the crisis. The institutional dilemma is explained by one practitioner:

'In a concentration of NGOs such as Goma there is such an imperative to establish a trademark and territory, and all the technical standards go to the wall. In Goma there has been a cholera epidemic which for all practical purposes ran a natural course despite the spending of several hundred million dollars on relief. In Goma, about 80,000 people or 8% of the population died. There were some 170 agencies in Rwanda engaged in uncoordinated relief action. For Save the Children Fund, it is a difficult question of either competing or staying away - in which case we lose out on both media coverage and money.'⁵⁹

The effect of Michael Buerk and Mohamed Amin's report in Ethiopia in 1984, as will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5, was a clear example of this difficulty.

Media dependency also operated at a more discrete level. Jonathan Benthall has written persuasively about popular images and narratives of disaster relief and how these are constructed by the media. He has argued that disasters are essentially packaged by the media and that such packaging is subject to the discourses and functions of the news room: the need to be 'pacifying and consensual'⁶⁰; the preference for strong visual images and sensationalism which typically present the Third World as a place of helplessness and negativity; the need to deliver 'hot news'; the tendency to gauge the scale of disasters according to the number of deaths; and the tendency to be susceptible to unpredictable shifts of consumer fashion.⁶¹ In effect, television news is

⁵⁸ Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media*, p. 27

⁵⁹ John Seaman, 'The changing context for international NGOs' in Royal Anthropological Institute, *International NGOs and Complex Political Emergencies*, p. 4

⁶⁰ Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media*, p. 193

⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp. 191-204

not well suited to exploring the social and economic disruption which both precedes and follows disasters; to shaking up the audience's social and political assumptions and giving a voice to unknown and unaccredited people; or to countering the image of 'disasters' as an event, a big story, a sensational human tragedy, here today and gone tomorrow.

Anne Winters, the Information Officer at United Nations Children's Fund Geneva, has written:

'the increasing trivialisation of the media because of the influence of television has been a subject of concern to communication experts for some years. The world of television and particularly of television news, is what has been called a 'peek-aboo' world where an event pops into view for a moment and then vanishes. It is a world of fragments, discontinuities, where the worth of information lies in its novelty and entertainment value rather than in its relevance to social and political decision-making and debate.'⁶²

Such one-dimensional representation and interpretation of disasters impacts on NGOs' operations by setting the narrative of the disaster and the parameters for public debate. As a result the media plays a crucial role in setting the configuration of relief: its timing; its nature; and its purpose. Cutler has shown how during the 1983-85 famine in Ethiopia, it was the power of the media that shifted an intervention-averse political environment into an intervention-friendly one, thereby enabling NGOs to act:

'in the case of the 1983-5 Ethiopian famine, it was initially risky for agency representatives to press for a response owing to resistance on behalf of their superiors in Europe and North America. Following the dramatic TV coverage of the famine, immense political pressure was put on those same organisations to respond. The risk profile had reversed; it had become risky not to be seen responding.'⁶³

Not only had humanitarianism, in this instance, become the responsibility of those who controlled and filtered the news; but it became dependent on the media's conception of the problem as 'a biblical famine'⁶⁴, an event manifest in mass starvation; what was missing was hard-hitting, complex political analysis. It was the absence of this analysis, discussed in chapters 4 and 5 below, that proved a major constraint to CA's

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 203

⁶³ Cutler, 'Responses to famine', pp. 81-82

⁶⁴ This was the text narrated by Michael Buerk that accompanied the international screening of Mohamed Amin's film on famine in Korem and Makelle relief camps, Ethiopia, on 23 October 1984

social justice mandate and ability to educate the public about the real situation during the 1983-85 famine.⁶⁵

Clearly, with the extension of media images and the extension of the scale on which NGOs are expected to operate, the ambiguities of charitable actions have grown. Agencies, like CA, have to balance the need to exploit the fund-raising opportunities presented by dramatic media reporting with the need to 'maintain an institutional ethos appropriate to the organization's "deprived" clientele and the professional practice of the field personnel directly concerned with them.'⁶⁶ Advocacy and development education, with its emphasis on reason and not emotion, on breaking down the stereotypical imagery of the Third World as a place of 'natural and political disasters and not much else'⁶⁷, on shifting the focus away from the logistics of aid to the wider field of moral and political considerations, sits uneasily against the tide of mass media discourse. Further, popular representations of 'the other' present problems not only with perceptions of the intended beneficiaries of programmes and their needs but also with the profile of indigenous relief agencies. Increasingly, in the context of conflict-famines, aid agencies rely on partners; in the 1983-85 Ethiopian famine explored in chapters 4 and 5, CA relied on the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) to deliver relief into rebel-held areas. Macrae and Zwi have written:

'such groups may have clear political allegiances. The provision of food into rebel-held areas may serve numerous functions over and above the humanitarian: by maintaining food supplies, civilian communities are able to remain in their homes, or at least within the region. This is significant not only for their own health, but also serves to legitimise the rebel force ... food aid may be used to feed military personnel.'⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Similarly, recent events in Rwanda were stereotyped as a sudden descent into primitive and atavistic tribalism; and relief conceived of in terms of setting up refugee camps for the 'neutral' survivors. A more thoughtful analysis of the crisis as the end product of a political and economic process, with beneficiaries as well as victims was not given as much publicity and the need for political solution was conveniently substituted with humanitarian action. For a political analysis of the crisis see John Eriksson, Synthesis Report, *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: lessons from the Rwanda Experience* (The Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda: Odense, 1996)

⁶⁶ Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media*, p. 56

⁶⁷ John Fiske, *Television Culture* (Routledge: London, 1987), p. 285 cited in *ibid.*, p. 187

⁶⁸ Macrae & Zwi, 'Famine, complex emergencies and international policy in Africa', pp. 28-29

In both instances, a particular fighting force may be sustained and the outcome of the conflict affected. NGOs' partners are political, they work in support of humanitarian and political survival. Yet they are presented as neutral agencies; the question of their political accountability ignored and the implications of their role on the dynamics of conflict left unchallenged. As will be shown in chapter 5, the broader public debates about political accountability at the national and international level are left untouched.

The above analysis implies that there are strong institutional reasons determining how discourses on famine and relief are generated and put to use. For CA, the functional effects of donor funding procedures and media representation in the 1983-85 famine impacted significantly on the agency's operational capability and will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5. In the 1973-75 famine, as discussed in chapter 3, the discourse and approach was determined more by the organisational imperative of needing to be seen to be doing something. The implication throughout was that in its operations in a relief policy environment, there were a number of issues that CA was unable to resolve because of various structural difficulties affecting the construction and presentation of discourse.

By the 1990s, key scholars, writing on disaster relief, had a clear message for agencies like CA: apolitical humanitarian approaches which equated famine with mass mortality and responded to physical need without regard to the political processes of famine, had not only proved inadequate at solving the problem of famine but had at times contributed to the problem, supporting forces which were promoting violence against civilian populations.⁶⁹ For some the validity of the entire humanitarian undertaking as it was then constituted was fatally flawed:

‘an exploration of the principles that drive “actually-existing humanitarianism” reveals that its power is exercised and its resources dispensed at the cost of

⁶⁹ African Rights, *Humanitarianism Unbound?*; Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*; & Duffield, ‘NGOs, disaster relief and asset transfer in the Horn’, pp. 131-157

weakening the forms of political accountability that underlie the prevention of famine.⁷⁰

For CA, this message had real meaning around a set of policy concerns in Ethiopia.

These will be looked at in the chapters below.

3. **Sustainable Development: exploring its meaning**

Historically, many agencies like CA began their lives as 'relief' organisations, responding to need in crisis situations. By the 1970s, many had moved towards development work, seeking a longer-term solution to the problems they were continually being called to face. Chapter 1 described how CA broadened its mandate in the 1960s from one committed to relief to one orientated towards sustainable development. Yet in reality, many agencies still found themselves tied up in responding to disasters. Much policy debate was therefore about how to move from relief to development. For CA in Ethiopia, a policy environment dominated by famine, such debates were particularly relevant. This section looks at the evolving theories surrounding this relief-development continuum, their meaning and their implication for CA. Notions of power, the way in which power emerges in agency interventions and how this effects CA are again considered, this time in the context of development. Whether local interpretations and priorities become more important when attention shifted from the immediacy of saving lives to support for rehabilitation and development is explored.

3.1 ***No shortcuts to progress***⁷¹

The fundamental characteristic of conventional discourse on development has been the assumption of the universality of social progress. As Duffield

⁷⁰Alex de Waal, 'Human rights and freedom from famine, (Preliminary draft, December 1995), Introduction, p. 5; In Somalia, De Waal argues that Northern NGOs and UN agencies have undermined the development of indigenous civilian institutions that provide a basis for mitigating disaster. Alex de Waal, 'Dangerous precedent? Famine relief in Somalia 1991-93' in Macrae & Zwi (eds.), *War and Hunger*, pp. 139-158

⁷¹ The quote refers to the main theme of Goran Hyden's book on development in Africa. Goran Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress: African development management in perspective* (Heinemann: London, 1983)

observed, 'development is a normative process of becoming: a series of interconnecting movements leading from poverty and vulnerability to security and well-being.'⁷²

Development is thus firmly rooted within a modernist paradigm. Certainly, within this paradigm, development theory has evolved; in the post-war era, 'development' was used to mean the process of transition or transformation towards a 'modern', 'capitalist', 'industrial' economy and was seen primarily as a function of capital investment, whereas from the mid-1970s, 'development' defined itself more in terms of 'quality of life', the reduction or amelioration of poverty and material want and was seen as a function of empowering civil society. Yet while the usage of development shifted from being a movement in history to a social programme with a more specific locational understanding of underdevelopment, the idea of development itself implicit in the literature and project papers still ran along modernist lines. In effect the idea that shared progress was the normal and long-term direction of all social change remained⁷³ and much of the language still viewed development as a linear sequence of change, from 'under-developed' to 'development', from 'vulnerability' to 'sustainability', from 'relief' to 'development.'⁷⁴

Moreover, despite the outward shifts in development practice from technology-centered to people-centered and from blueprint to process development, the power effects of the discourse remained essentially intact. Development was perceived as an externally quantifiable change of state among populations, and one that could be managed by the application of a range of universally applicable technologies and procedures, typically implemented through 'projects'. Thus it was possible to speak about development without reference to the specific context in which it was to occur, or the particular local configuration of socio-economic and political processes that might have rendered it problematic in a given situation. In his study of the development apparatus in Lesotho, Ferguson has shown how the discursive construction of Lesotho as an object of development 'bracketed' out alternative interpretations. The result was

⁷² Duffield, 'Complex emergencies', p. 38

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 38

⁷⁴ Adams & Bradbury, *Conflict and Development*, p. 28

the application of a standardised rural development package and in the process, an expansion and entrenchment of bureaucratic state power. Ferguson commented that the development apparatus in Lesotho was,

‘an “anti-politics machine”, depoliticising everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of expanding bureaucratic state power.’⁷⁵

As with discourses on famine, the removal of ‘development’ from its locally based economic and political context meant that ‘development’ could be established as a subject of scientific knowledge, the content of which need not necessarily refer to that context in order to be understood. Ferguson commented:

‘through Africa - indeed, through the Third World - one seems to find closely analogous or even identical “development” institutions, and along with them often a common discourse and the same way of defining “problems,” a common pool of “experts,” and a common stock of expertise. The “development industry” is apparently a global phenomenon.’⁷⁶

Such characteristics of theory and practice have impinged directly on CA. CA’s theoretical and structural origins, as discussed in chapter 1 above, were firmly framed within a modernist paradigm, development was constructed as a relatively linear process, a function of capital investment and the adoption of northern technologies, and the organisation’s mode of operation was essentially project based, with a package of goods or services being delivered. It was on the issue of how to contextualise development, how to locate it in a particular local configuration of socio-economic and political processes, that CA, as discussed in chapter 1, experienced so much internal debate and division. Indeed it was this issue that provided the rationale for CA’s institutional restructurings from the 1970s to the 1990s. As discussed in chapter 6, it was an issue that CA was never able to resolve. Here, a development programme supported by CA in southern Ethiopia is analysed. The findings suggest that even in the 1990s, it was more convenient for CA to promote particular, off-the-shelf intervention ‘packages’ which framed problems and solutions in technical terms obscuring alternative analyses such as those which might have been found in the realm of political

⁷⁵ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politic Machine*, p. xv

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 8

economy. Development became stereotyped and in the process it was removed from its own context into the realm of regulation and control by humanitarian and development institutions. Moreover, the power effects produced in this, and discussed in chapter 6, imply that Ferguson's analysis of an 'anti-politics machine' in Lesotho may constitute a more general institutional tendency of development agencies.

To understand how development is constructed and why CA, like other agencies, has had difficulties escaping from conventional modernist discourse, the structural influences that impact on agencies need to be considered. These are similar to those determining discourse on relief, discussed above. In brief, discourses are constructed to correspond with the only sort of intervention a development agency is capable of launching: the apolitical, technical development intervention. As Ferguson argued with reference to Lesotho, 'the constitution of Lesotho as a suitable theoretical object of analysis is also, and simultaneously, its constitution as a suitable target for intervention.'⁷⁷ Certainly, in the 1960s and 1970s, as described in chapter 1, CA was not organisationally equipped to deal with anything other than the provision of neutral services and goods. And while, reforms and restructuring designed to create a more strategic organisation were implemented in the mid-1970s, 1980s and 1990s, this issue of capability remained. Secondly, the functions of donor funding and media dependency ensure that physical western technological transfer predominate over less 'do-able', 'noticeable' and 'quantifiable' processes of people-centred development. Again this was an issue that CA was never able to resolve and will be discussed in chapter 6 in terms of CA's institutional need for clear, visible and quantifiable results.

By the 1980s an alternative approach to development was being advocated by key scholars.⁷⁸ The message for agencies like CA was similar to that on famine and relief discussed above: intervention needed to begin with a broader analysis of the problem and in particular the historical and socio-political context. Most importantly,

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 73

⁷⁸ Korten, 'Third generation NGO strategies', pp. 145-59; Elliott, 'Some aspects of relations between the north and the south in the NGO sector', pp. 57-68; Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress*; Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: putting the last first* (Longman: London, 1983); Bratton, 'The politics of government-NGO relations in Africa', pp. 569-87

agencies needed to wake up to the fact that the problem might not be one of underdevelopment but of maldevelopment. One strand of research argued that problems of development and change in Africa reflected a more general crisis within the global community, characterised by the increasing marginalisation of the South. Focusing on the resurgence of armed conflicts in Africa in the 1980s and 1990s, key scholars identified a structural crisis in Africa's formal economies, brought about as a result of global political, economic, and social transformations.⁷⁹ In turn, a significant shift on the part of the North away from development investment to relief assistance for the South was identified, institutionalised through donor-NGO and United Nations-NGO sub-contracting relations as described above.⁸⁰ This was seen to represent an accommodation that left untouched the global dimensions of the systemic crisis. New mechanisms of international accountability and new strategies for disbursing international relief and development assistance were needed.⁸¹ The conventional discourse of development, with its linear notions of social change, was incapable of understanding political crisis as anything but a short-term or abnormal occurrence. As Duffield observed, it was 'powerless and uncomprehending in the face of growing systemic crisis and political fragmentation, a trend that is the antithesis of the developmental world-view.'⁸² This issue of the global dimensions of underdevelopment had particular relevance to CA's attempts to find a voice, as discussed in chapter 1 above. Debates and internal tensions about whether CA's mandate would best be served by advocacy and by promoting 'conscientisation' among the poorer communities overseas or by supporting traditional fund-raising and project work were to occur throughout its history. As will be shown in chapters 4 and 5, in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s, the implications of an official international relief policy divorced from an understanding of the political crisis - a crisis that had been fanned by cold war politics -

⁷⁹ Mark Duffield, Joanna Macrae & Anthony Zwi, 'Conclusion' in Macrae & Zwi (eds.), *War and Hunger*, pp. 222-32; Adams & Bradbury, *Conflict and Development*; Duffield, 'The symphony of the damned', pp. 173-193

⁸⁰ Adams & Bradbury, *Conflict and Development: organizational adaptation in conflict situations*, p. 20; Borton, 'Recent trends in the international relief system', pp. 187-201; Duffield, 'Complex emergencies', pp. 37-45

⁸¹ Duffield, 'Complex emergencies', p. 43; Duffield, Macrae & Zwi, 'Conclusion', p. 230

⁸² Duffield, 'Complex emergencies', p. 38

and of a destructive government development policy - also supported by international power, initially by America and subsequently by the Soviet Union - impacted directly on CA's capabilities. Moreover, while CA pursued an alternative approach to engagement in the South, it was ultimately limited, as discussed in chapters 4 and 5 below, by the absence of international accountability in the international community. This made the transition between relief and development particularly difficult.

3.2 New approaches to sustainable development: rethinking the relief-development continuum

For CA, a major policy concern in Ethiopia was how to move from famine relief to development; how to move from the costly and short-term business of disaster-response to the more long-term business of providing poor people with secure livelihoods and efficient safety-nets. Certainly, by the 1980s, the increase in the number of displaced Ethiopians and refugees, implied that rehabilitation and the linking of relief to development had become a crucial concern. This section looks at the relevance of theories about the relief-development continuum to CA's experience.

Initially, when agencies like CA shifted their focus from relief to long-term development in the 1960s and 1970s, 'disasters' as a policy concern were dropped from the main agenda. Disasters were portrayed as temporary interruptions to the long-term process of linear development. 'Relief' became something to be undertaken to get back to development. Within this modernist paradigm, the transition between emergency, rehabilitation and development was normative and programmatic, often institutionally expressed by different planning procedures, different staff and different budgets. However as conventional discourses on relief and development began to be challenged, in a large part due to the resurgence of complex emergencies in Africa in the 1980s, a growing interest in linking relief and development emerged, at an institutional and theoretical level.⁸³ The division between development and relief, as emergency needs were increasing and as the experience of living with high risk became ever more

⁸³ For an analysis of recent debates about the relief-development continuum see the articles in *IDS Bulletin*, 25 (October 1994)

central to poor people themselves, appeared unsustainable. While the conventional discourse - treating famine and relief as an aberration - had driven a conceptual wedge between famine and development, the new approach argued for a more holistic response, and one more responsive to local interpretations. It was increasingly recognised that for poor people, "relief" and "development" were inextricably bound together in the complex and day-to-day business of managing risk and securing livelihoods. As described above, scholars, from the 1980s, argued that famine was a process embedded in local economics and politics. The message for agencies like CA was clear: if poor people planned for 'uncertainty as norm'⁸⁴, then a more complex model of the relief-development continuum was needed.

There were a number of key elements to this challenge for a new model. Firstly, that during times of hardship, people survived largely because of their own strategies - 'relief aid rarely accounts for more than 10-15% of the total food consumption in an area stricken by famine'⁸⁵ - and that consequently, 'enabling people to help themselves is a far more effective means of overcoming hunger than sending relief.'⁸⁶ Significantly what was being argued was not that the existence of survival strategies removed the need for relief but that relief might best be constituted in the light of such survival strategies. External interventions needed to be planned to take account of local capacities, as well as vulnerabilities. Certainly CA's experience of relief camps in Ethiopia in the 1970s, as described in chapter 3 below, highlighted the need to adopt a more empowering approach. To some extent this was attempted with the Afar nomads through food-for-work programmes, also discussed in chapter 3, but ultimately the framework was too narrowly defined and lacked operational capability. In contrast, CA's operations in the 1983-85 famine, discussed in chapter 5, provide a clearer and more successful example of building on local capacities and enabling people to help themselves.

⁸⁴ M. Mortimore, *Adapting to Drought: farmers, famines and desertification in West Africa* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge) cited in Margaret Buchanan-Smith & Simon Maxwell, 'Linking relief and development: an introduction and overview' *IDS Bulletin*, 25 (October 1994), p. 3

⁸⁵ African Rights, *Humanitarianism Unbound?*, p.13

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 13

Secondly, that relief could undermine development just as inappropriate development could cause emergencies. What was needed was a model for the simultaneity of relief and development strategies - 'long-term development programmes need to be tested against their ability to give people the capacity to deal with crises, while short-term relief activities need to take into account future needs and long-term consequences of their actions.'⁸⁷ Not only did the opportunity exist to make famine policy preemptive and not merely reactive but at the same time, it appeared possible to make preparation for famine an ally of development, indeed a core component of development as against being an alternative to it.⁸⁸ This issue of simultaneity was to be a crucial part of CA's involvement in northern Ethiopia in the mid-1980s and a key strategy of CA's partners in Eritrea and Tigray.⁸⁹

Thirdly, that disasters were rarely proceeded by a 'return to normal' and that in many cases in Africa, people were subject to catastrophic disempowerment and asset depletion.⁹⁰ This was an important challenge to conventional linear relief-development models. Survival strategies 'cost' and the trend was for assets to reduce: 'in responding to the famine currently growing in northern Sudan, peripheral rural group have not made good their losses in livestock, movable wealth, and so on, since the last famine of the mid-1980s.'⁹¹ It was argued that various economic and political constraints often forced the adoption of 'less-favoured' survival strategies which were generally more damaging. In this respect, intervention needed to take account of and support local socio-economic responses: freeing up markets; pressing for greater freedom of human and livestock movement; supporting employment schemes; and assisting the survival of livestock (by providing fodder, veterinary services and free water).⁹² An important factor contributing to the vulnerability and asset depletion of the victims of the 1983-85 famine in Ethiopia was the impact of military tactics on important survival strategies.

⁸⁷ Adams & Bradbury, *Conflict and Development*, p. 41

⁸⁸ John Osgood Field, 'Understanding famine' in Field (ed.), *The Challenge of Famine*, p. 22

⁸⁹ See chapters 4 and 5 below

⁹⁰ David Keen, *Famine, Needs-Assessment and Survival Strategies in Africa* Oxfam Research Papers No. 8 (Oxfam: Oxford, 1993), pp. 19-26; & Mark Duffield, *War and Famine in Africa* Oxfam Research Paper No. 5 (Oxford: Oxfam, November 1990), pp. 11-12

⁹¹ Duffield, *War and Famine in Africa*, p. 12

⁹² De Waal, *Famine that Kills*, pp. 214-226

For CA, as will be shown in chapters 4 and 5, the issue of supporting local socio-economic responses thus became crucial.

Fourthly, that emergencies were intimately linked to the essential development situation of communities; that strategies for meeting such emergencies had to address fundamental development; and that such strategies needed to take account of the historical, socio-economic and political processes within that locality. A crucial aspect of the alternative discourse was the need not only to see relief and development as organically linked but to find new ways of engaging with the local reality and political processes. This related, in particular, to situations of conflict where it was recognised that conflict could not be held in isolation from discussion of mainstream development policy but was the outcome of competing strategies between individuals and groups of individuals within the socio-economic landscape. As Keen argued for Sudan:

‘the coming of Sudan’s second civil war should be seen not so much as a senseless outbreak of violence interrupting processes of development, but rather as the most extreme expression of the resource conflicts, exploitation, and resistance bred by a pattern of uneven development that has created losers in the north as well as the south. This pattern of development was sponsored by the British, and reinforced by multilateral institutions like the World Bank. It is one thing to condemn violence; it is another, and more useful, exercise to sponsor a pattern of development that makes violence less likely.’⁹³

Insecurity and violence were developmental issues. Conflict was often a result of unequal development. Certainly Ethiopia, in the 1970s and particularly the 1980s, was a country in which resource conflicts, exploitation and uneven development were expressed in violent conflict. As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, CA recognised that the conflict could not be held in isolation from discussion of mainstream development policy and made choices, to support the relief-development model of the liberation movements and not that of the Ethiopian government, accordingly. Moreover, it was argued that conflict was not necessarily temporary but might represent a permanent emergency, developed to support the survival of the powerful.⁹⁴ In order to achieve sustainable development, to link relief and development, the reality of power differentials and the economies that sustained them needed to be understood. In

⁹³ Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*, p. 233

⁹⁴ Duffield, ‘NGOs, disaster relief and asset transfer in the Horn’, pp.131-157

programming, this strand of thinking argued that approaches to relief and development had to give ample consideration to underlying political causes and possible solutions. In this respect, it was argued that only a relief approach that adopted 'solidarity' principles of strategic long-term programming, such as participation and the employment of local knowledge could lay the basis for meaningful development in the long-term. At issue was the need to understand the social reality of conflict and turbulent change. The role played by Northern NGOs in sustaining the predatory military and political power of the Ethiopian government during the 1983-85 famine has been dealt with in detail by key scholars.⁹⁵ For CA, the result was a polarisation of the aid community around two approaches to relief, one channeled through the government and the other channeled through the liberation movements. The conflicting information, claims and operations that resulted from this, impacted significantly on CA's capabilities, as will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5 below.

Violence was not however just seen as an issue of war: 'there is a need to broaden the debate on development in conflict beyond the large-scale wars and "complex emergencies" to the daily conflicts, disputes, and insecurities that people face in "peaceful" situations.'⁹⁶ Indeed, some argued that poverty itself was an act of 'structural violence.'⁹⁷ Such violence moreover was not simply the result of political and economic processes but was 'deliberately organised.'⁹⁸ In this respect a development model that ignored power differentials or heightened social and economic disparities was seen to end up sustaining endemic violence. Chambers argued that the main responsibility for the failure of development policies to benefit the poor lay with the tendency of such projects to ignore the political dimensions of development.⁹⁹ This applied to relief situations as well. McCann has shown how the response to drought and subsequent famine in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s was not chaotic, but was a process

⁹⁵ J. W. Clay, 'Western assistance and the Ethiopian famine: implications for humanitarian assistance' in R. E. Downs, D. O. Kerner & S. P. Reyna (eds.), *The Political Economy of African Famine* (Gordon & Breach Publishers: Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 147-175; Africa Watch, pp. 359-378

⁹⁶ Adams & Bradbury, *Conflict and Development*, p. 4

⁹⁷ J. Galtung, 'Violence and peace' in Smoker Davies & Munske (eds.), *A Reader in Peace Studies* (Pergamon, 1990), pp. 9-14 cited in Adams & Bradbury, *Conflict and Development*, p. 18

⁹⁸ Adams & Bradbury, *Conflict and Development*, p. 18

⁹⁹ Chambers, *Rural Development*, pp. 140-167

determined by pre-existing social and economic institutions; that the effects were distributed unevenly, in that they represented a process of relative enrichment for some households just as they represented tragedy for others; and that without an understanding of the terms under which production and distribution of resources take place, relief and rehabilitation programmes often had a biased social impact, benefiting those households or household members (typically adult males) who had power and creating a class of vulnerable individuals with little ability to command food or economic resources.¹⁰⁰

The above analysis has explored the difficulties surrounding development and has implied that new approaches to sustainable development have involved a re-thinking of the relief-development continuum. For CA, such difficulties and debates have been important and can be seen reflected in practice. In the 1970s, as will be shown in chapter 3, CA drew a distinction between relief and development and adopted a linear approach. CA's interventions with the Afar nomads, Ogaden herdsman and Wollo tenants ignored the political dimension of their situation and ended up heightening social and economic disparities. By the 1980s, by operating through and relying on the Eritrean Relief Association and the Relief Society of Tigray, CA's approach was more holistic and reflected the changing theoretical framework. As described in chapters 4 and 5, local socio-economic and political processes were taken into account and solidarity principles of strategic long-term programming were adopted. In this sense, the basis for and prospect of meaningful development in the long term was strengthened. The description of a development programme supported by CA in chapter 6 however adds a cautionary note. The implication of the analysis is that the intervention, in certain areas, had a biased social impact, supporting those households, individuals and local organisations that had power, and creating certain groups with little ability to command future benefits. It would appear that on the issue of securing

¹⁰⁰ James McCann, 'The social impact of drought in Ethiopia: oxen, households, and some implications for rehabilitation' in M. Glantz (ed.), *Drought and Hunger in Africa: denying famine a future* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1987), pp. 261-265

sustainable development, CA has experienced a number of difficulties.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has looked in general terms at the ideas that have informed intervention; how ideas have been put to use; and what effects they have produced. It has looked at theories of famine, relief and development, in that order, as this sequence most typically reflects the history and policy concerns of agencies like CA. Having explored the debates and problems surrounding each, the analysis has ended by showing how the various debates have come together in evolving theories surrounding the relief-development continuum. Two issues in particular have emerged. One, using Foucault as a tool of analysis, is that discourse on famine, relief and development is linked to the prioritisation of certain kinds of institutional practices, that in the process local interpretations and alternative approaches are bracketed out and that this produces important power effects. Second, that structural relationships, arrangements and imperatives continue to influence how discourse is generated and put to use. Thus despite shifts in the theoretical perspective, agencies continue to come up against the functions of donor funding, media dependency, charitable law, and ultimately the institutional need to be publicly seen to be doing something and succeeding at it.

For CA these issues had real meaning around a set of policy concerns in Ethiopia over 30 years. As will be shown in the chapters below, the way in which power is elaborated through relief and development has had profound implications on CA's capabilities. In the 1970s famine intervention, the result was a heightening of power differentials and socio-economic disparities.¹⁰¹ In the 1980s, the result was a process of empowerment.¹⁰² The record of development, discussed in chapter 6, was more confused. In all interventions, institutional structures determined how far practice could go in reflecting theory. The implication from the theoretical perspective analysed above and from its relevance to CA is that despite shifts in theory, structural difficulties make it difficult for agencies to move beyond a disaster-response type of approach.

¹⁰¹ See chapter 3 below

¹⁰² See chapters 4 and 5 below

Chapter 3 THE 1971-75 ETHIOPIAN FAMINE

In 1968 rainfall in the West African Sahel faltered and then in 1972 and 1973 failed throughout the region. It is estimated that one-quarter of the Sahel's livestock may have died.¹ The number of human deaths is unknown. An extensive review of the available demographic information found that it was impossible to establish reliable demographic figures for mortality before the drought, and even less possible to establish a useful estimate of famine mortality. It concluded that the figure of 100,000, often quoted², was probably exaggerated.³ The Sahelian drought also extended into the Horn of Africa and southwards into East Africa. Since the mid 1960s, rainfall in the Wollo region of northern Ethiopia had been low; in both 1971 and 1972 it failed seriously and by May 1973 many were dying.⁴ Deaths were estimated at between 40,000 and 80,000.⁵ During 1974-75 the drought shifted south-eastwards to the Ogaden border with Somalia, where an estimated 55,000 died.⁶ Rainfall also failed in arid regions of Sudan, Kenya, and Tanzania. For CA, these 'natural' calamities opened a new, more intense, chapter in Africa.

One aspect was the scale and type of disaster response: in Ethiopia, CA became involved in new partnerships and greatly expanded operations. In 1970, CA's income, £2,848,657, had scarcely risen for a decade. Six years later, following famine in Ethiopia and the Sahel, it was £4,757,910.⁷ Another aspect was a realisation that not only in a war did a famine have to be 'man-made'. As Black writes, 'the tragedies in Ethiopia, the Sahel ... were blamed not only on the weather, but on national and international neglect of peoples whose fate was marginal to the political and economic

¹ Jonathan Derrick, 'The great West African drought, 1972-74' *African Affairs*, 76 (1977), pp. 543-5; & J. C. Caldwell, 'The Sahelian drought and its demographic implications' (Overseas Liaison Committee of the American Council on Education, 1975), pp. 20-21

² Hal Sheets and Roger Morris, *Disaster in the Desert: failure of international relief in the West African drought* (1974), pp. 1 & 49

³ Caldwell, 'The Sahelian drought', pp. 8-15 & 23-27

⁴ D. S. Miller & J. F. J. Holt, 'The Ethiopian famine' *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 34 (1975), pp. 168-9

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 171

⁶ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 6

⁷ CA financial statements and reports (1951-84), (SOAS.CA/J/1)

interests of those manipulating the levers of power.’⁸ Further, ‘a closer look showed up something even more fundamental: the iniquitous impact of the forces of modernity - or ‘development’ - on ancient environmental equilibrium.’⁹ The horrors of mass famine mortality focused attention on Africa’s poor and blew away the euphoria that had accompanied much of the development work of the 1960s. For CA, as for others, ‘development’ had failed and the organisation was still in a position of reacting to a situation once it had got out of control rather than dealing with the underlying causes of the poverty and vulnerability that created such a situation.

This chapter looks at CA’s experience of famine in Ethiopia in the 1970s. The aim of the study is to find out how CA responded to the crisis, how it turned intentions into action, and to understand the influences - structural and theoretical - that impacted on it. The aim is not to condemn the relief operation but to understand it in all its complexity and from there to see a way forward. The chapter begins with an outline of vulnerability to famine in rural Ethiopia and a brief sketch of the profile of the 1971-75 famine. The causes of the famine are analysed and the nature of the official discourse on the disaster discussed. The second part addresses CA’s involvement. It looks at how CA positioned itself within the official discourse and why, and examines the effect of its intervention. The implications of the experience are explored in the conclusion.

1. ‘Famine’ Discovered

In the previous chapter it has been argued that conventional discourses on ‘famine’ - characterised by a focus on food supply and natural disaster - are often more representative of Western biases than of the concerns of the people who actually suffer and as such are in need of thorough critique. This study of famine and relief in Ethiopia follows this line of argument. It supports Sen’s analysis that ‘the Ethiopian famine [1972-74], took place with no abnormal reduction in food output, and consumption of food per head at the height of the famine in 1973 was fairly normal for Ethiopia as a

⁸ Black, *A Cause For Our Times*, p. 239

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 239

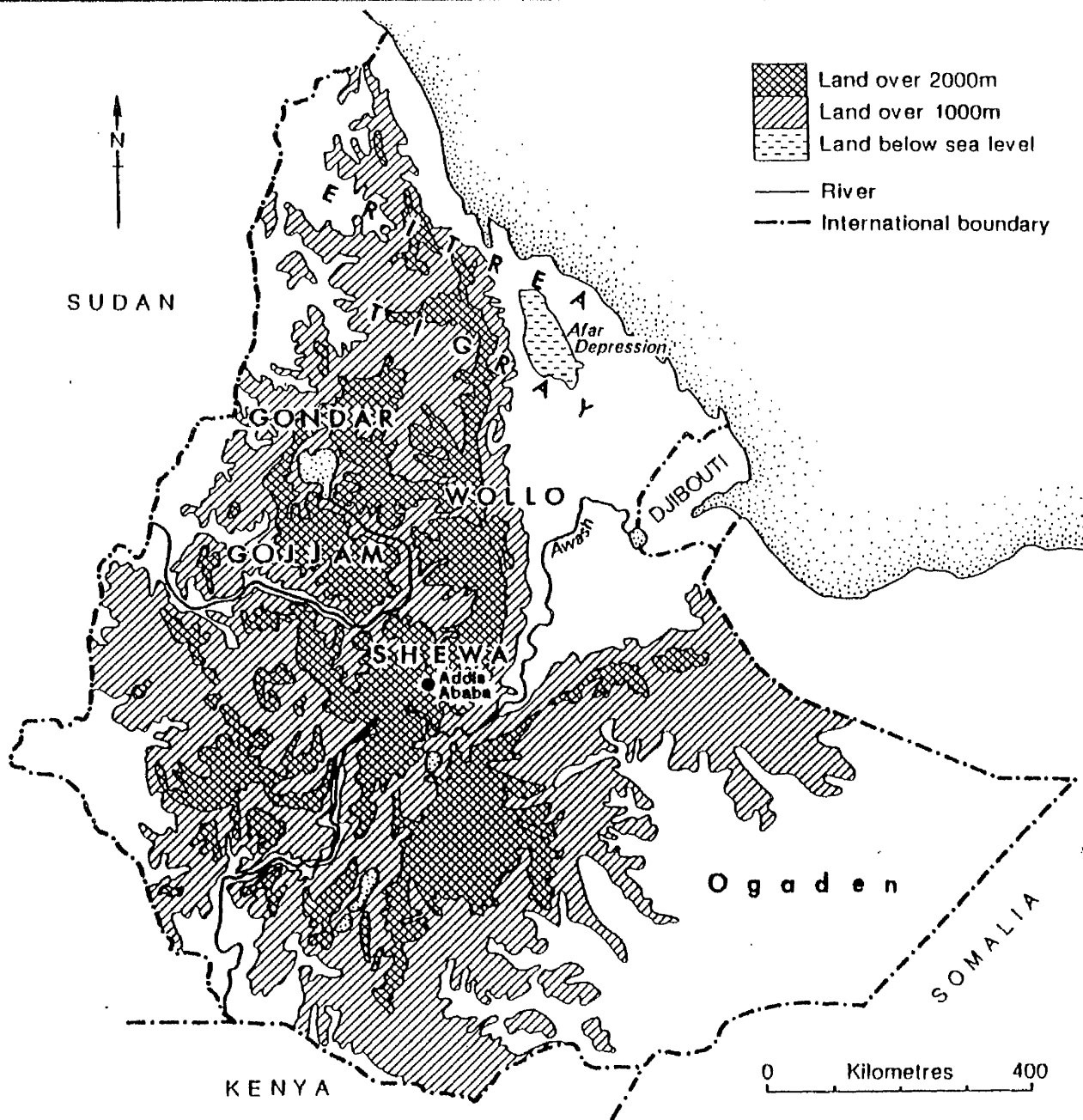
whole.’¹⁰ Where it differs from Sen’s interpretation is redirecting the emphasis to a political-economy analysis rather than concentrating on the purely ‘economic’ dimensions of famine; the focus is not solely on the victims but on the beneficiaries, and the analysis is of famine as ‘process’ and not simply ‘event’. It is within this interpretive framework that CA’s performance is examined.

¹⁰ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, p. 111

Map 3.1 Ethiopia - topography

Source: G. Kebede & M. Jacob, 'Drought, famine and the political economy of environmental degradation in Ethiopia' *Geography*, 73 (1988), pp. 66

Map 3.1: Ethiopia - Topography



Source: G. Kebede & M. Jacob, 'Drought, famine and the political economy of environmental degradation in Ethiopia' *Geography*, 73 (1988), p. 66

1.1 *Vulnerability to famine in rural Ethiopia*

Famine has been a common occurrence in Ethiopia and during the latter twentieth century, its recorded incidence appears to have increased, with hardly a year going by without an outbreak of famine somewhere in the north (see table 3.2 below). Indeed, 'to Wollo peasants, famine is as familiar as their villages.'¹¹ This section provides a brief historical analysis of the root causes of vulnerability to famine of individual peasant households. This will involve an overview of rural Ethiopian environment, history and political development. Such an analysis is important because it provides the framework in which the discourse on the 1970s famine and the subsequent relief actions can be better analysed.

Much of the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia experience a season of main summer rains (kremt), which run from June to September. The timing and duration of the rains can vary considerable. In parts of the highlands, a short spring (belg) season precedes the main rains, usually in March to April. Although the belg season typically provides only 5-10% of total crop production, it is very important in some locations (such as western Wollo), where it accounts for up to 50% of production. Eritrea and much of Tigray receive only the main kremt rains. The highlands support the vast majority of the population, most of whom are cultivators growing a wide variety of crops, especially annual grain crops, at various altitudes. These include teff (the most prestigious staple), wheat, barley, millet, sorghum and maize. The highlands' farming system centers on the ox-plough (marasha) which is used to prepare the land. To the south and east the highlands give way to lowlands. These support much sparser populations which rely on pastoralism for a livelihood, although in many cases this will be supplemented with a degree of cultivation. In the southern and north-eastern lowlands there are two rainy seasons, the first occurs in April/May and the second in October/November. The rainfall in the lowlands is generally less than in the highlands. A failure of one rainy season is quite common,

¹¹ Alemne Dejene, *Environment, Famine, and Politics in Ethiopia: A view from the village* (Lynne Rienner Publishers: Boulder, Colorado, 1990), p. 69

while the failure of two rainy seasons in succession is potentially disastrous for the pastoral production system.

While agriculture is central to the Ethiopian economy, to see the highlands as an environmentally determined agricultural peasant economy made up of a simple agglomeration of individuals excludes other important aspects of rural life that are crucial to understanding the complexity of people's vulnerability and the socio-economic dimensions of famine. McCann has argued that, 'the image of the insular, long-suffering Ethiopian peasant' and the view that saw 'highland farmers and highland agriculture as static and self-contained ... [have] obstructed understanding of the rural economy and social history of northern Ethiopia.'¹² Rural Ethiopia is better understood as a pattern of geographically-specialized areas, with a set of exchange relations linking them. As one analyst observed:

'the fundamental dichotomy is between areas which are normally surplus-producing, and areas which are regularly in food deficit. In the north, the surplus areas include: Gojjam province, southwestern Wollo, central Gonder and Simien, Raya district in eastern Tigray and Shire district in western Tigray. These areas are not particularly drought-prone; even when drought hits other parts of the country, they normally continue to produce adequate crops or surpluses ... the food deficit areas include most of the rest of northern Ethiopia, especially some parts of eastern Gonder, northern and eastern Wollo, most of Tigray, and almost all of Eritrea.'¹³

The western highlands are most favoured climatically for crop production, receiving the highest amounts of rainfall, which is normally well-distributed. The north is less well-favoured. The variability of rainfall also appears to be greater in the north. Most of the deficit areas produce a good harvest perhaps once or twice a decade and a run of six or seven years of crop failure is not unusual. Farmers living in deficit areas make good that deficit through a number of strategies articulated with the market and the regional economy: migrating to surplus-producing or coffee-producing areas in order to work for money; engaging in petty trade - salt, grain, animals and consumer goods; selling animals - both pastoralists of the lowlands and many highland farmers earn a considerable income from selling animals; remittances from relatives working in towns,

¹² James McCann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia: a rural history 1900-1935* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1987), p. 69

¹³ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 31

particularly in Eritrea which had larger cities, more industry and more ready access to neighboring countries.¹⁴

When famine occurs in the northeast it is rarely the case that all areas are affected equally and at the same time.¹⁵ Treated as a whole, northern Ethiopia has rarely been in overall food deficit. Overall food production per caput appears to have grown over the period 1974-76 to 1981-83, rising from 127 kg per caput to 145 kg per caput (see table 3.1 below). However these figures conceal great regional variations, and considerable year-to-year fluctuations in food production. What it does reveal is that the problem of famine has not been one of overall food availability, of household resource management, but of food distribution, of the relations of production between producers and non-producers.

Table 3.1 Cereals Production and Net Food Availability Per Caput 1972-84

YEAR	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
Cereals Production (kg)	140.1	136.2	115.3	139.8	126.2	111.2	141.5
Net Food Availability (kcal)	1584	1584	1566	1549	1611	1521	1654
YEAR	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	
Cereals Production (kg)	169.9	145.7	136.3	166.0	133.0	112.2	
Net Food Availability (kcal)	1791	1861	1817	1704	163	1695	

Source: FAO cited in P. V. Cutler, 'The development of the 1983-5 famine in northern Ethiopia' (PhD thesis: London University, 1988), p. 214

It is within the evolution of the Ethiopian political economy, that these relations of production can best be explored and the historical constraints on the fulfillment of Ethiopia's production potential analysed. Ethiopia, as we know it in the 1990s, is the product of the expansion of a state, known as Abyssinia, centered in the northern

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 32-33

¹⁵ Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies*, p. 68

highlands into adjoining areas, mostly to the south.¹⁶ Originating from the Aksumite empire - first referred to in written records in the first century AD - Abyssinia was ruled from the middle of the 11th century by the Zagaw dynasty. In 1270, this dynasty was overthrown by another based on the Amhara, who claimed descent from Solomon. From the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, conflict ensued with the expansionist Muslims, as both sides sought control of the south and eastern lowlands. Eventually, with the help of the Portuguese, the Muslims were expelled. However, the Abyssinians then fell prey to 'a highly virile provincialism'¹⁷. By the late 18th century, the monarchy had become eclipsed, and a period known as the 'age of princes' followed, with endemic conflict being waged by provincial nobles seeking control over the state. This began to change in the mid-nineteenth century, as the northern kingdoms began a process of political centralisation, acquisition of European weaponry, and conquest of their southern neighbours. This reached its climax under Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913). Menelik doubled the size of the empire within a few decades, established the boundaries of modern Ethiopia and the supremacy of the Shewan Amhara. Menelik's military achievements were followed by attempts to create the trappings and structures of a modern state: a modern army was established; and the elements of a modern administrative structure began to appear. Menelik was succeeded for a brief period by his grandson, Lij Yasa, who was ousted in 1916 by the Shewan nobility for sympathising with Islam. He was in turn succeeded by Ras Tafari Makonnen, later crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1930. Haile Selassie continued the process of centralisation and modernisation, until he was overthrown by a coup in 1974 and replaced by a military committee, the Derg.

As Hoben has written, 'the dominant secular ethos of northern Ethiopian (Amhara and Tigrayan) society was military, rather than agrarian' and 'the path to upward mobility for the lord was thus through success in court politics, loyal service to

¹⁶ For a history of Ethiopia's political economy see John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1974), pp. 13-26; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974* (James Currey: London, 1991)

¹⁷ Markakis, *Ethiopia*, p. 17

his liege lord and military prowess, especially in the conquest of new lands.¹⁸ If the nobles and gentry did not have strong incentives to make long-term investments in the land, neither did the peasants. This can be explained by the structure of the agrarian system. It has often been argued that historically this system can best be described as feudal. The relation between those who controlled the sources of rural wealth and those who produced it, and the social status of the latter in the overall political economy of the country, were essentially feudal in nature. This approach however is only valid to a certain extent and it should be recognised that it does not fully explain all the intricacies of the land system in all parts of the country.¹⁹ While feudal relations of production can be said to have existed in the southern and south-western regions, although as a hybrid of non- and pre-feudal forms and varying in character from one region to another, the 'tributary' systems of the northern areas cannot be adequately explained in this way. In addition the concept of Ethiopian feudalism underestimates the role of the state in agrarian relations. Essentially, however, the system was characterised by the extraction of surplus from the peasantry by a ruling class. Forms of extraction included the land-tax; the asrat which amounted to a tenth of the peasant's harvest; obligation to supply provisions for officials and visitors passing through the district; provision of firewood; provision of honey; 'gifts' made at the appointment of a new governor, his promotion or decoration, or the birth of a son to him; and labour on the state or governor's land which generally took about a third of the peasant's labour time.²⁰ Within this system, the peasants did not have strong incentives to make long-term investments. While a large number, particularly in the north, enjoyed reasonable security of access to a share of their ancestral lands, as 'rist' or family land-holders, the periodic reallocation of land, the scattered and changing composition of the parcels that constituted a

¹⁸ Allan Hoben, 'The cultural construction of environmental policy: paradigms and politics in Ethiopia' in Melissa Leach & Robin Mearns (eds.), *The Lie of The Land: challenging received wisdom on the African environment* (International African Institute in association with James Currey: Oxford, 1996), pp. 189 & 190

¹⁹ For a discussion of Ethiopian land tenure systems, see Allan Hoben, *Land Tenure among the Amhara of Ethiopia* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1972); Dessalegn Rahmato, *Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia* (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies: Uppsala, 1984); Dan F. Bauer, *Household and Society in Ethiopia* (African Studies Center: Michigan State University, Michigan, 1977); & Markakis, *Ethiopia*, pp. 73-91 & 104-129

²⁰ Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, p. 87

household's holding and the division and redistribution associated with inheritance, all militated against the concept of an enduring family estate or 'farm'. Rights to the land were usufructury and not private, farmers could not sell them for a profit or be certain of leaving them to their heirs. Agricultural production was primarily for subsistence, tax and tribute. This situation of insecurity was even more evident among the large number of tenants, leasing private land from the state or individuals, who themselves had been given the land by the state in reward for good service. Within this agrarian system, the lack of reinvestment of surplus in agricultural infrastructure or techniques, combined with the demands of army provisioning on peasant production, seriously impacted on resistance to periodic production failures through drought, pest attack or warfare.

The slow process of modernisation of the state, begun under Emperor Menelik II in the late 19th century, did little to alter these underlying structures. Indeed, processes of modernisation were funded with surpluses extracted from the peasantry. In particular, the expansion of the imperial state under Haile Selassie led to increased demands on the peasant household. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, not only had taxes and demands on labour increased but they had done so in ways that considerably enlarged the risks to the household economy: the proportional (asrat) tax was largely supplanted by fixed taxes payable in cash. In agricultural systems dominated by unstable production conditions (weather, pests, access to means of production - oxen), fixed taxes put the household economy and the rural production system in jeopardy.²¹ Thus the operations of the state under Haile Selassie's regime continued to siphon off resources from the rural society without providing for the development of the productive forces in agriculture.²² Foreign investment, welcomed under Haile Selassie, was mostly confined to export crop production in a few areas. Capitalist development of agriculture was not widespread geographically, and where it did take place, peasants and pastoralists became swiftly marginalised and more vulnerable to famine as they were denied access to land which they had traditionally cultivated or used for grazing. This was particularly the case in the Awash valley discussed below.

²¹ McCann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia*, p. 140

²² *ibid.*, pp. 125-143

In spite of its natural endowment, Ethiopia by the latter twentieth century was believed by experts to be facing an environmental crisis.²³ As one analyst commented:

'Much of the north has a dissected, sloping terrain, fragile soils and is subject to highly erosive rainstorms during the main agricultural season. This area has little natural tree cover; its soils are low in organic matter and are subject to severe soil erosion. The plough-based mixed farming system contributes to soil erosion through fine tilling, mono-cropping, and a lack of vegetative cover during part of the heavy rains ... In the present century natural forest, which was extensive, has been reduced and grasslands brought under the plough ... there can be no doubt that there are serious problems of soil erosion in the extensive areas of highland Ethiopia.'²⁴

In Rahmato's analysis of the physical setting in Wollo, resource degradation appeared critical:

'In areas specialising in grain cultivation, particularly in the traditional famine areas, an average of about 100 tons of soil per hectare per year is permanently lost. The highest rate of erosion within the seed-farming regions occurred in Wollo, with the higher elevations of the province contributing most to the destruction of ecology compared with the lower. In about two and a half decades, resource degradation could wipe out about 15% to 20% of the province's farmland affecting the livelihood of well over half a million peasants.'²⁵

While the case for environmental crisis should be treated with caution, it is clear that Ethiopia's landscape by the latter twentieth century was in parts showing signs of degradation.²⁶ Yet northern Ethiopians have been aware of soil erosion and traditionally have practiced some forms of conservation.²⁷ Historically, political, institutional, and economic conditions have given them little opportunity or incentive to invest in agricultural intensification and labour-intensive conservation measures. In this respect, processes of agricultural change have reflected historical events and the wider political-economy. In southern Ethiopia, pressures on the environment were caused by the conquest and occupation of what is now southern Ethiopia by the northern armies in the latter nineteenth century. Large numbers of northerners settled in the agro-pastoral

²³ For a balanced discussion of Ethiopia's natural resource base and trends in resource use, see IUCN (International Union for Conservation of nature and Natural Resources), *Ethiopia National Conservation Strategy*, Phase I Report, (IUCN, 1990) pp. 8-28 cited in Hoben, 'The cultural construction of environmental policy', p. 188

²⁴ Hoben, 'The cultural construction of environmental policy', pp. 188-189

²⁵ Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies*, p. 55

²⁶ For a more cautious analysis of 'environmental crisis' in Ethiopia see Hoben, 'The cultural construction of environmental policy', pp. 201-202; James McCann, *People of the Plough: an agricultural history of Ethiopia 1800-1990* (University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, Wisconsin, 1995), pp. 31-38

²⁷ Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies*, pp. 81-87

regions, extracting labour and tribute from the indigenous peoples. The introduction of the plough and of grain crops, as well as the new labour demands, contributed to new problems of soil erosion. Northern settlers also moved southwards into forested areas in the west, clearing the land and introducing plough agriculture. In his analysis of rural history in the early part of the twentieth century, McCann has shown how changing government policy was dynamically linked to environmental management.²⁸

Historically, the relationship between security and productivity has been structured by social and political processes. In this respect, there have been winners and losers:

‘the conditions that promoted the cycle of impoverishment ... also stimulated a reciprocal, but much smaller, cycle of enrichment whereby wealthy peasants and officeholders expanded their control over the means of production through the manipulation of changing rural institutions.’²⁹

State officials and newly favoured local elites were able to insulate themselves from the effects of declining productivity by living off fixed assessments of labour, food, and cash.³⁰ Vulnerability was a product of the essential development situation of the communities who suffered and as such, reflected their political and economic marginalisation. While one way of interpreting such vulnerability may be in feudal terms, as indicated above, this should not obstruct an understanding of more complex social formations and exchange relations in the highlands, or of a modernising and expanding state. During the course of the twentieth century, the relationship between the state and agriculture changed dramatically, creating new vulnerabilities.³¹ Under Haile Selassie, the rural economy was penetrated by the state and urban interests. In the process, decision-making about local conditions shifted: ‘from an early period when local officials were tied to farmers through local reciprocal links to a system of central government bureaucrats relating to rural producers through the market or through imperial edicts.’³² It was this increasing gap between government policy and the state of

²⁸ McCann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia*,

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 180

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 180

³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 125-143

³² *ibid.*, p. 202

the local economy, that famine in the second half of the twentieth century was to highlight.

Ethiopian rural society in 1971-75, against a backdrop of population growth, faced a chronic shortage of productive resources - particularly land, oxen, forage, modern technology and water; and lacked local grain stores or meaningful contact with a heavily centralised government and central markets. The roots of this vulnerability lay in historical and conjunctural socio-economic and political processes that impacted on investments in agriculture. In this respect, particular groups were rendered particularly dependent on unreliable environmental factors. As Wolde Mariam observed:

'vulnerability to famine ... is much more a function of the relationship between subsistence producers and the socio-economic and political forces rather than a function of the relationship between the former and the conditions of the physical environment.'³³

1.2 *Profile of the famine 1971-75*

During the early 1970s, there were two separate famines in Ethiopia, and for analytical purposes it is important to distinguish them: in 1971-73 the northern highlands, especially Wollo and parts of Tigray and the northern Rift Valley experienced severe drought and repeated crop failures; and in 1973-75 the drought moved south, centering on the lowlands of Harerghe. The biggest part of the mortality owing to starvation occurred in 1973, much of it in Wollo. Between 40,000 and 80,000 people died in Wollo; while an estimated 55,000 died in the Ogaden.³⁴

As already mention, even under normal climatic conditions, little excess grain was produced in the northern area of Ethiopia where the relief effort of 1973 was concentrated. Between 1966 and 1973 the rainfall had been erratic, resulting in poor harvests and inadequate grazing for livestock. Local food shortages occurred periodically during this time, leading to population movements and government relief. In the Ogaden region of southern Harerghe province, a pattern of decreasing rainfall since about 1969 had been observed.³⁵ 1971 was a particularly bad year in a number of

³³ Wolde Mariam, *Rural Vulnerability*, p. 14

³⁴ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, pp. 6 & 58; & Miller & Holt, 'The Ethiopian famine', p. 171

³⁵ Julius Holt & John Seaman, 'The scope of the drought' in Hussein (ed.), *Rehab: drought and famine in Ethiopia* (International African Institute: London, 1976), p. 2

areas: north east Wollo suffered a near-disastrous crop failure in the plain of Raya and Qobbo; in the northern Ogaden, Cossins reported an exceptionally severe main dry season with unusual losses in cattle; and for the Mursi in southern Gemu Gofa, Turton cited 1971 as the first of three years of consecutive rain failure and food shortage unprecedented in living memory.³⁶

The crisis was precipitated in northeast Ethiopia by a very serious and wide-spread failure of the main kremt rains (June to September) in mid-1972 followed by an almost complete failure of the spring belg rains (March to April) in early 1973.³⁷ In the desert areas of Wollo and Tigray, the drought probably had the most disastrous effect in that little or no grazing remained by the early part of 1973. Serious disruptions of the normal market equilibrium occurred, turning the terms of trade against the pastoralists: the cost of grain bought by merchants and sold in the large towns rose steeply, while the price obtained for cattle, sold in order to buy grain fell.³⁸ Retrospective interviews of camp inmates in Korem, Alamata and Qobbo shelters showed a pattern of response to increasing hardship which developed over up to three years prior to the onset of the famine.³⁹ From these interviews, the path towards destitution for farmers was put together. It began with reduced crops and grazing. Small-scale farmers, whether tenants or family-land (rist) holders lost cattle, then oxen, through death or enforced sale. They ran out of seed, particularly when a second planting was necessary after a false start to rains. Dependents (e.g. divorced sisters and young kinsmen, given food and shelter in return for labour) and servants were evicted to fend for themselves and were amongst the first to gravitate towards the towns. As crisis approached, the farmers were forced to sell their livestock, pawn or even sell their land and, in the last instance, the wood from which their houses was built. Tenants were evicted from the land by landlords who undertook planting with the labour of their own kin. Far more men than usual left

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 1-8

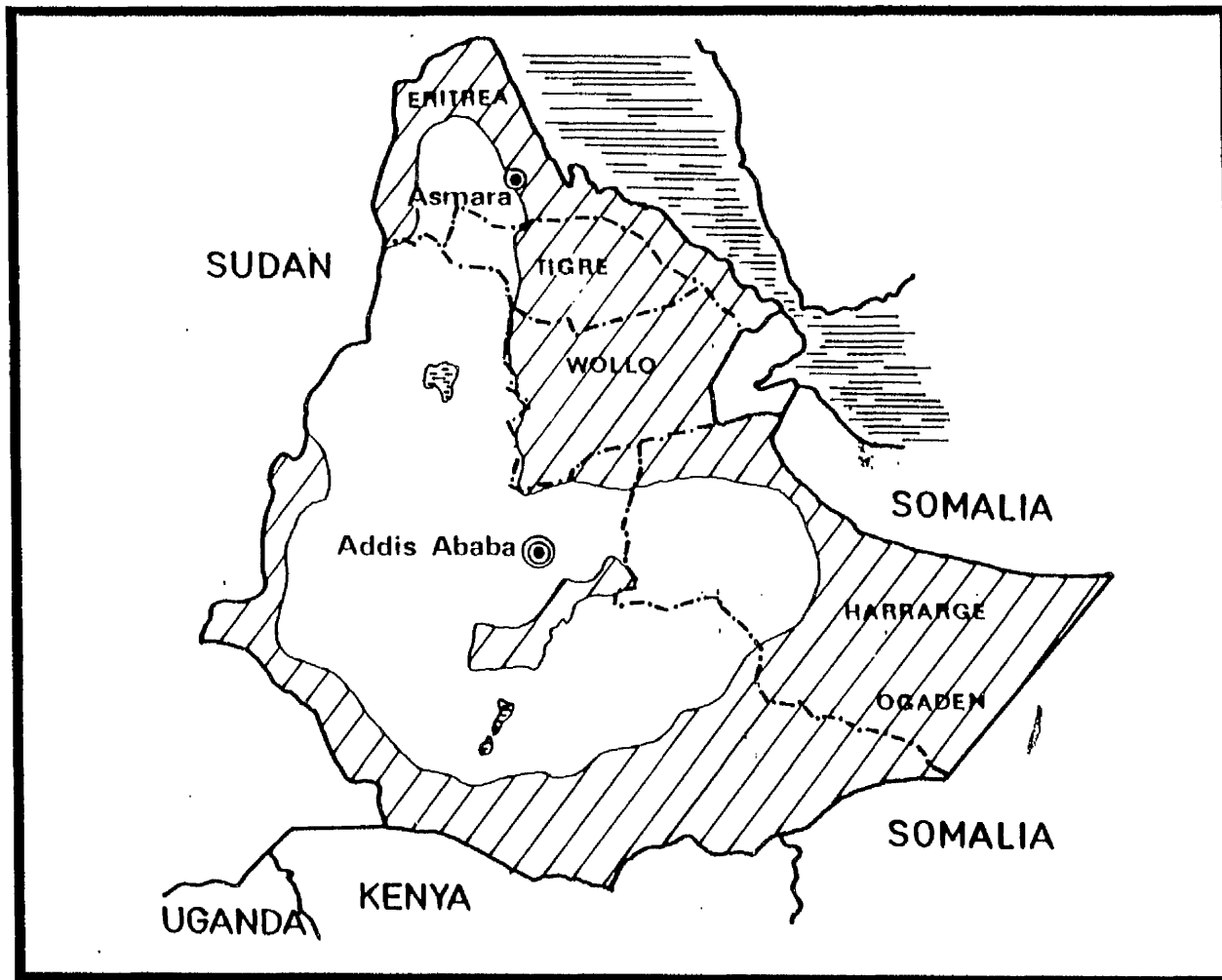
³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 2

³⁸ Pastoralists in Ethiopia tend to meet about half their calorie requirement through exchanging animals for grain. J. Rivers, J. Holt, J. Seaman, & Bowden, 'Lessons for epidemiology from the Ethiopian famines' *Annales Societe Belge de Medecine Tropicale*, 56 (1976), p. 354 cited in Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, p. 105

³⁹ G. M. Mahari et al., *Profile of Wollo under famine: survey March-April 1974* (Ethiopian Nutrition Institute: Addis Ababa, 1974), cited in Holt & Seaman, 'The scope of the drought', p. 4

their families on the land and went in search of daily labour or harvest work to local towns, to the Setit-Humera cash-cropping region of Begemdir along the Sudan border, or to the cotton plantations on the Awash river in southern Wollo. Meanwhile the wives and children sought shelter with relatives or came to the towns to beg and seek relief.

Map 3.2: Ethiopia - famine stricken zones 1971-75



Source: Mehari Gebre-Medhin & Bo Vahlquist, 'Famine in Ethiopia - the period 1973-75' *Nutrition Reviews*, 35 (1977), p. 196

The group that suffered most from the famine were the Afar pastoralists who inhabited the middle and lower Awash Valley. Famine had already arrived in early 1972 and the cumulative effect of eviction from their dry-weather grazing pastures, which had since the 1960s been 'developed' for growing commercial crops - particularly cotton and sugar- by a few big companies; and constriction of their movement by increasing armed clashes with their nomadic neighbours and competitors, the Issa, deprived them of the means of responding to that threat.⁴⁰ Another group who suffered severely were the farmers in the middle-altitude areas of northern and central Wollo. Those who suffered most were tenants. The Raya and Azebo Oromo had been reduced to that state by 'massive land alienation after they participated in the Weyane revolt against Haile Selassie in 1943.'⁴¹ Others had been forced to mortgage or sell their land by the stresses of repeated harvest failures in the early 1970s and by 1973 the enforcement of crippling tenancy contracts reduced them to starvation at the same time as grain was being exported from the area to the provincial capital Dessie, and to Addis Ababa.⁴² In Tigray the famine appeared much less severe, despite the prevalence of drought. The difference was largely accounted for by the different systems of land tenure as in Tigray most farmers owned their own land.⁴³

In December, 1972 the Ethiopian Red Cross was helping over a thousand refugees from Wollo who had arrived outside Addis Ababa, the Afar featuring prominently among them. By the beginning of 1973, it was apparent that a serious problem was at hand, but it was not until the end of February that the Food and Agriculture Organisation issued its Early Warning Food Shortage report and not until April that the Ethiopian government requested aid through the international agencies.⁴⁴ Reports of the impending situation had started to reach the outside world by the spring

⁴⁰ See Helmut Kloos, 'Development, drought, and famine in the awash valley of Ethiopia' *African Studies Review*, 25 (December 1982), pp. 21-48; Maknun Gamaledinn, 'State policy and famine in the awash valley of Ethiopia: the lessons for conservation' in D. Anderson & R. Grove (eds.), *Conservation in Africa: people, policies and practice* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1987), pp. 327-344; Glynn Flood, 'Nomadism and its future: the Afar' in Hussein (ed.), *Rehab*, pp. 64-66

⁴¹ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 60

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 60

⁴³ K. J. Lundstrom, *North-East Ethiopia: society in famine* (Uppsala, 1976) cited in Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 60

⁴⁴ Miller & Holt, 'The Ethiopian famine', p. 169

of 1973. On 22 March 1973, the Secretary for Social Affairs in the Ethiopian Church cabled the World Council of Churches in Geneva: 'Wollo Province drought-stricken. Many dying. Mass exodus to other provinces. 2000 people without shelter and food. Emergency aid needed urgently.'⁴⁵ With the almost complete failure of the spring rains of 1973, the situation deteriorated. Yet the regional authorities and the central government still remained officially reluctant to acknowledge it. Wolde Mariam has documented how it was only pressure from the University of Addis Ababa and Parliament, coupled with increasing public reporting by individuals and journalists that forced the government to act and send the first 10,000 quintals of grain to Wollo and northern Shewa to help victims of 'drought' in April.⁴⁶ Finally, on 27 April 1973, the Amharic daily newspaper *Addis Zemen* reported the official request for outside assistance. It was estimated from official records that nearly 2 million people were affected, and the grain required was calculated as of the order of 50,000 tons a month.⁴⁷ It was not however until September 1973, at the end of the starvation crisis, that the first international relief teams arrived and not until November 1973 that the first shipment of foreign relief grain arrived.⁴⁸

The 1973 planting season heralded a general break in the drought in the northeast and rainfall in the two subsequent seasons was adequate, allowing for an increased concentration on rehabilitation and development measures. While the situation slowly improved in Wollo and Tigray, it deteriorated in other parts of the country. Poor rains during mid-1973 resulted in a crisis in the south, affecting principally Harerghe and to a lesser extent Bale and Sidamo. The worst affected area was the Ogaden, Harerghe's southern province. This lowland area had experienced erratic rainfall from 1969 onwards. The area's vulnerability had been further increased by the effects of a punitive campaign of pacification in the Ogaden, following resistance against taxation in the mid-1960s. Africa Watch has documented how the cumulative effect of 'economic

⁴⁵ Cited in Mehari Gebre-Medhin & Bo Vahlquist, 'Famine in Ethiopia - the period 1973-75', *Nutrition Reviews*, 35 (1977), p. 196

⁴⁶ Wolde Mariam, *Rural Vulnerability*, pp. 43-50

⁴⁷ J. Mason & R. W. Hay & J. Holt, J. Seaman & M. R. Bowden, 'Nutritional lessons from the Ethiopian drought' *Nature*, 248 (April 19, 1974), p. 647

⁴⁸ Holt & Seaman, 'The scope of the drought', p. 3

war' and a policy of encouraging Amhara farmers to settle in the more fertile areas, especially around Jijiga, deprived the Ogaden pastoralists of use rights.⁴⁹ Lack of access to these pastures was to become critical when drought struck in 1973-74, following a general failure of the 1973 autumn rains. Also badly hit were the Issa Somalis in the Issa Desert who were themselves suffering from loss of pastures to immigrant farmers, restrictions on movement, and armed clashes with the Afar (conflict intensified by structural changes to both Afar and Issa production strategies).⁵⁰ From May 1974, thousands of people, mostly pastoralists, flocked into some 18 relief centers. A surveillance team in the Ogaden in May 1974, reported that the worst affects of the drought had occurred in the Ogaden with death rates about three times their normal and with the majority of livestock lost.⁵¹ It reported that without food distribution famine would result. In the event the 1974 autumn rains (October - November) in the Ogaden failed and by early 1975, 80,000 people were living in relief camps.⁵²

1.3 *A political economy of famine in Ethiopia 1971-75*

The famines in northeast and southeast Ethiopia arose from a combination of four processes: the erosion of rural production systems; the failure of market strategies; the failure of non-market survival strategies; and the inadequacy of relief.

The first process of famine, a sharp decline in assets and production, emerged from a long history of exploitative processes in the geographical areas affected, processes that had created famine in the past (see above). Further such processes had impoverished some while conferring benefits on groups with superior access to political power. Vulnerability had arisen through lack of political power as much as lack of purchasing power. Of course, not every group that benefited from famine deliberately set out to create it. The point is that in order to understand the process of famine both

⁴⁹ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 71

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 72-73

⁵¹ John Seaman, Julius Holt & John Rivers, 'Harerghe under Drought' (RRC: Addis Ababa, 1974) cited in Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 73

⁵² Holt & Seaman, 'The scope of the drought', pp. 1-8

sides of the coin - the 'winners' as well as the 'losers' - need to be addressed. In the northeast it was the Afar pastoralists and tenants in the middle-altitude areas of northern and central Wollo, especially in Raya and Azebo, who suffered most. In the south, it was the Ogaden and Issa Somali herdsman. In each case, it was the conjuncture of structural changes affecting local economies with drought that created famine. An anthropologist working with the Afar at the time, graphically described this conjunction:

'their [the Afar] relative autonomy has been severely threatened since the early 1960s by the establishment, with the aid of massive investments of foreign capital, of highly profitable irrigated agricultural units in the Awash Valley. The effect of development on the pastoral economy has been belittled by those concerned, but there is no doubt that the Great Famine of 1972/3 owed much to it.'⁵³

In the Ogaden, it has been argued that it was the counter-insurgency strategies of the imperial state which created famine when drought struck in 1973-74. Two separate insurgencies during the 1960s and 1970s, one centered in the Ogaden and the other in Harerghe had led to 'punitive expeditions', which killed or confiscated large number of animals, depriving the pastoral communities of the basis for their survival.'⁵⁴ A key element to the pacification campaign in the Ogaden was the government control of water points. As one analyst observed:

'a network of functioning wells is crucial to the mobility which herders need in order to seek out seasonal pastures. There are many reports of the wells dug by the Ogaden people themselves being poisoned. New reservoirs (*birkas*) were built by the government, but primarily to serve the interests of settler farmers and townspeople.'⁵⁵

In many ways, the famine can usefully be seen as a deepening of exploitative processes - major land alienation, restriction on movements etc. - already existing in normal times.

In addition to forcible alienation of resources and violence, elsewhere the evidence of an impoverished social system was overwhelming. The northern centered famine occurred at a time when the country had sufficient food supplies. As Mejid Hussein argues, 'the worst affected areas of both Wello and Tigray could have been supplied from the surplus of nearby Gojjam and Begemdir-Simien.'⁵⁶ Groups of people

⁵³ Flood, 'Nomadism and its future', p. 64

⁵⁴ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 71

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 72

⁵⁶ Abdul Mejid Hussein, 'The political economy of the famine in Ethiopia', in Hussein (ed.), *Rehab*, p. 33

starved to death in Ethiopia, not because of an extreme shortage of food but because the food was not distributed.⁵⁷ Drawing from the Commission of Inquiry into the Wollo famine of 1973⁵⁸, Wolde Mariam has documented the elaborate and coordinated efforts of state officials at national and provincial levels to cover-up the Wollo famine and prevent relief assistance.⁵⁹ He gives evidence that 'Government officials at all levels ... had information on the imminent famine at least six months in advance, and in many cases more than a year in advance.'⁶⁰ Reports had been reaching the Ministry of the Interior, via Dessie, consistently from as early as August 1971 that food aid was needed in many awrajas (provinces) of Wollo. The Commissioner's report pointed out that there was a surplus of food in other regions of the country as well as in parts of Wollo at the time and that the crisis would have been contained if the available resources of the country had been sufficiently mobilised for the purpose.⁶¹ The Ministry of Agriculture was certainly aware of the severe food shortages that threatened Wollo by November 1972, following its own qualitative survey of the country's crops.⁶² Yet the information was not made public. It was not until March 1973 that the completed crop report was published and then given only an extremely limited circulation. The Report covered 82% of the total number of weredas (districts) and gave 'by and large a reasonably complete picture of the staple grain production for the areas surveyed.'⁶³ Its authors gave a clear warning of the impending disaster in Wollo and also of the precarious situation in the lowland and mainly easterly crop producing areas of Eritrea, Tigray and Shewa :

'the most serious problem is centered in the lowland areas east of the escarpment road in Tigray and Wollo and the lowlands of northern Shewa with a less serious problem appearing in Eritrea, Harerghe and Begemdir-and-Simien. The nomadic areas of Geleb and Hamer Baco in Gemu Gofa has also reported drought and famine conditions for the past two years and the situation

⁵⁷ Girma Kebbede, *The State and Development in Ethiopia* (Humanities Press: New Jersey, 1992), p. 76

⁵⁸ Commission of Inquiry, *The Details of the Wello Famine*, (in Amharic, Addis Ababa: Ethiopia, Tiqimt 1968). The Commission was established by the military government to investigate why and how famine occurred. It reported its findings in October 1975.

⁵⁹ Wolde Mariam, *Rural Vulnerability*, pp. 40-51

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 42

⁶¹ Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies*, p. 102

⁶² Hussein, 'The political economy of the famine in Ethiopia', p. 23

⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 9-43

reportedly has become worse this year. Also the nomadic area of Awsa awraja [province] in Wollo is suffering from continued drought.’⁶⁴

In August 1973, two consultants to United Nations Children’s Fund visited Wollo and prepared a report on the famine conditions that detailed the estimated number of deaths and the sufferings of the survivors. One copy reached ministerial level, whereupon an order was issued that the report should be suppressed. When it was suggested that the report might help to attract international donations, the vice-Minister of Planning responded: ‘if we have to describe the situation in the way you have in order to generate international assistance, then we don’t want that assistance. The embarrassment to the government isn’t worth it. Is that perfectly clear?’⁶⁵ Among the sixty or so officials executed by the military authorities in November 1974 for various political offenses, at least four were directly implicated in this cover-up of the Wollo famine.⁶⁶

By the time drought arrived in Ethiopia, traditional systems of production and of famine protection had evidently been eroded by a number of political and economic developments. Relations between local authority and the imperial state had been recast reducing accountability between government policy and the state of the local economy: ‘in the new relationship, local leadership received state sanction less from the successful manipulation of local legitimacy than from the ability to draw on personal support and armaments from the central state.’⁶⁷ Meanwhile national economic policy channeled investment into large cash-crop enterprises such as those in the Awash valley, while a steady stream of cheap labour was supplied by the pauperisation of the highland environment, through surplus-extraction and lack of investment. For the Ogaden, Issa and Afar nomads, as for the Raya and Azebo Oromos, the experience of famine was not about starvation but about the survival of a way of life, their political survival.⁶⁸ The

⁶⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 23

⁶⁵ Jack Shepherd, *The Politics of Starvation* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington DC, 1976), p. 33

⁶⁶ Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies*, p. 102

⁶⁷ McCann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia*, p. 110

⁶⁸ Flood, ‘Nomadism and its future’, pp. 64-66

famine process was fundamentally about politics and processes of modern state formation.⁶⁹

The second process of famine was the failure of the victims' market strategies. Sen has published data collected at the time by the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture which suggests that of the 14 districts in Ethiopia only 7% had a substantially below normal output of food grains.⁷⁰ He concluded that there was 'very little evidence of a dramatic decline of food availability in Ethiopia coinciding with the famine.'⁷¹ Yet while there was no noticeable food availability decline for Ethiopia as a whole in the famine year of 1973, there was clearly a shortage of food in the province of Wollo. Why then did food not move into Wollo from the rest of Ethiopia, what was the relationship between the famine victims and their local markets?

The behaviour of markets during the crisis in Wollo has been interpreted differently. Sen has argued that grain prices did not rise very far or for very long during the 1972-73 Wollo famine. He used wholesale prices from the provincial capital of Dessie in southern Wollo to support his case, arguing that Ethiopian subsistence farmers derived their food entitlements substantially from their own production, and were unable to buy food, even at normal prices, when their crops failed. Market failure in Wollo was thus interpreted as a direct result of the low purchasing power in the province.⁷² Seaman and Holt have argued, on the other hand, that grain prices did rise to exceptional heights during the famine, indicating that there was a problem of supply and not just demand. They observed that by the middle of 1973, grain prices in the capital of Wollo, Dessie, had approached twice their normal level, whilst a flow of grain out of the province to Addis Ababa and Asmara continued. By the end of September 1973, however, grain prices had returned to within 15% of the recent pre-drought level.⁷³ The main harvest would not be in until the end of the year, and relief

⁶⁹ 'The case of northeast highlands ... provides ample evidence that not all areas and all peoples of northern Ethiopia benefited from the process of modern state formation.' McCann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia*, p. 4

⁷⁰ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, p. 90

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 92

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 111

⁷³ Holt & Seaman, 'The scope of the drought', pp. 1-8

grain from outside the area had reached only a small proportion of the population, in tonnages that were unlikely to have affected the local market so significantly. The explanation provided by Seaman and Holt indicated a broader political-economy analysis of markets and price behaviour:

‘whilst thousands of families came to the very end of their resources during this period, there were many others, particularly in the highlands, who withheld their stocks from the market until they were confident that the 1973 main season would give them a reasonable return on their planting, and then in late August or September began to sell their stocks on the market again.’⁷⁴

The implication was that economic phenomena could not be properly understood without an analysis not only of the political context in which prices were created but also the ways in which certain groups were able actively to shape markets and to benefit from the price changes that accompanied famine. This was a fundamental departure from Sen’s economic approach.

Other analyses of market failure in Wollo, have stressed their isolated and fragmented nature. Devereux has argued that markets generally fail in rural Africa when ‘self-provisioning food producers suddenly become market-dependent consumers.’⁷⁵ He argued that the fact that traders fail to meet rural needs for food is not entirely because of lack of entitlements (‘pull failure’) but because of the ‘distortion of normal market activities which this dramatic transformation entails.’⁷⁶ Village markets in famine-prone areas of Ethiopia were small and isolated. A 1983 survey by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Agriculture Organisation found that Wollo peasants were far less integrated into the market economy than other peasants in Ethiopia.⁷⁷ During the 1972-74 famine, the demand for food rose, but this was a temporary, localized phenomenon. Recognizing this limited scope for profiteering or being unable to logistically supply unusual markets, traders simply continued supplying their usual customers in towns and cities. The ‘transaction costs’ of high transport costs and of

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 1-8

⁷⁵ Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, p.186

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.186

⁷⁷ C. Tagoe, *Ethiopian Highlands Reclamation Study: a tentative review of agriculture in the Highlands* (MoA-FAO: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, November 1983) cited in Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies*, p. 58

temporarily reorienting trading routes dissuaded traders from abandoning their larger, permanent markets in the cities. As Devereux observed:

'the more isolated and fragmented markets are, the greater the incentive for traders and producers to hoard food for speculative or precautionary purposes, and the more likely it is that those markets that do exist will become completely distorted during a local food shortage.'⁷⁸

Griffin and Hay have identified grain price variability, both over time and between villages which are fairly close together, as evidence of fragmented markets in Ethiopia, and they have differentiated between the effects of patchy infrastructure development and market imperfections, placing both in a political context:

'the evidence thus points to a highly fragmented market with very imperfect flows of grain and information the most obvious reason for the limited movement of grain is the nature of the roads and the limited access they provide to rural areas. Grain may have to be packed by mule for days to reach a market where merchants are buying. Furthermore the road system has been developed to serve Addis Ababa. Direct inter-regional links are non-existent ... a combination of demand pattern, the political imperative to feed the urban population and poorly distributed transport infrastructure determines the pattern of grain flows, leaving much of the rural areas isolated and without access to the national market. ... Often the market, such as it is, breaks down entirely and there is little or no trading in areas where production has been disrupted by drought.'⁷⁹

A pattern of price ripples identified as a feature of the 1974 famine by Seaman and Holt lends support to this 'market fragmentation' analysis of the famine.⁸⁰ They have suggested that prices rise in a series of 'ripples' around a food shortage region as those afflicted migrate to neighbouring markets where food is more readily available. This observation contradicts the neoclassical economist's belief that the 'invisible hand' of market allocation will ensure that food supplies move in response to price signals, from surplus to deficit areas. The 'price ripple hypothesis' reflects the reality of the breakdown of markets and market signals which typically accompany a crop failure in isolated, self-provisioning communities.

Importantly, certain groups with superior access to state power were able to benefit from the price changes that accompanied the famine:

⁷⁸ Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, p. 99

⁷⁹ K. Griffin and R. Hay, 'Problems of agricultural development in socialist Ethiopia: an overview and a suggested survey' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 13 (October 1985), pp. 46-49

⁸⁰ J. Seaman & J. Holt, 'Markets and famines in the Third World' *Disasters*, 4 (1980), pp. 283-297

'wealthy landlords and village chiefs, able to withstand the effects of the drought, have taken the opportunity to buy land and cattle from destitute peasants only too eager to sell their property for a pittance to buy food.'⁸¹

One group particularly 'decimated by the market mechanism'⁸² were pastoralists forced to make distress sales due to exceptional cash needs at a time when the exchange rates between animals and grains were unfavourable. A detailed survey of market prices conducted by Seaman, Holt and Rivers showed how the exchange rates between animals and grain collapsed in a dramatic manner in the southern famine areas of Harerghe.⁸³ This decline in exchange position was coupled with the loss of animals during the drought. Sen has calculated the percentage losses of grain entitlement from animal holding as 84% for southern Ogaden, 86% for northern Ogaden and 92% for the Issa desert.⁸⁴ Thus characteristics of exchange relations between the pastoral and the agricultural economies contributed to the starvation of the herdsmen by making price movements reinforce the decline in the livestock quantity. The failure of the government to intervene in the situation reflected the marginalisation of the pastoralists.

Changing prices in grain and animal markets give important insights into the evolution of the famine process. Yet these economic phenomena cannot be properly understood unless the political context in which prices were created and the ways in which certain groups were able to benefit from the price changes that accompanied famine, are analysed. In this respect the lack of physical infrastructure (roads) and market infrastructure (cash available for food purchase) in Ethiopia underscored the inability of the regional or local economies to interact with the national level. Famine highlighted this relationship. Moreover normative patterns of resource distribution were intensified during famine. As McCann has argued:

'the response to drought and subsequent famine is not chaotic, but is a process determined by pre-existing social and economic institutions ... further, the effects of drought are distributed unevenly, in that they include a process of relative enrichment for some households just as they represent tragedy for others.'⁸⁵

⁸¹ *The Sunday Times*, 25 November 1973

⁸² Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, p. 112

⁸³ Seaman, Holt and Rivers, 'Harerghe under Drought', (RRC: Addis Ababa, 1974) cited in *ibid.*, pp. 105-108

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 109

⁸⁵ McCann, 'The social impact of drought in Ethiopia', p. 247

The failure of market strategies can not simply be understood as a failure of 'entitlements' but needs to be seen as a process in which assets are transferred from victim to beneficiary groups in a context of acute political powerlessness on the part of the victims.

The failure of non-market survival strategies was another critical element in the evolution of the famine. These strategies included rationing consumption, gathering wild foods, finding new sources of income, calling on remittances from families or redistributive mechanisms within the community, freedom of movement, the use of grain stored from previous harvests and attempts to call upon political accountability. While some non-market strategies clearly offered valuable protection to some individuals and groups of individuals during the famine, we shall consider those strategies that were severely constrained in the context of the famine, notably by the influence of political factors.

The negative impact of restrictions on mobility has already been mentioned with regard to pastoral production systems. Mobility was crucial to the Afar, Ogadeni and Issa pastoralists. In times of drought, when resources were short, this ability to move freely over large distances became a vital survival strategy and means of securing livelihoods. Yet alienation of pasture and restrictions on movement had seriously reduced the ability of each of these groups to survive. The result was social breakdown and a desperate flight into relief camps - a highly publicised famine response but a severely limited and misunderstood one.

For particular groups of farmers in northeast Ethiopia, the slow on-set of famine and a history of exploitative economic processes had constrained the options for non-market strategies. Poorer tenants, indebted to and tied to their landlords, were prevented from migrating⁸⁶; few households were able to rely on grain surpluses stored from previous harvests⁸⁷; and lack of capital formation reduced options for strategic risk-management. Further, the evidence suggests that the survival strategies employed were

⁸⁶ A. P. Wood, 'Farmers' responses to drought in Ethiopia' in Hussein (ed.), *Rehab*, pp. 67-88

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 67-88

those typically employed at a later, more desperate, stage of an evolving crisis⁸⁸; that they involved a costly commitment of domestic resources; and a commitment that was in many instances irreversible. Sale of livestock, land and domestic assets - the last resort of an under-capitalised household unit - all jeopardised future rehabilitation. In the context of underdevelopment, survival strategies represented a deepening of processes of economic marginalisation and asset divestiture.

Finally, a crucial non-market survival strategy that ultimately failed was recourse to protest and supplication. The right to petition the Emperor had been a right of every Ethiopian citizen.⁸⁹ In November 1972, the Emperor Haile Selassie visited Wollo. His itinerary was secretly changed at the last moment so that he would avoid meeting 20,000 villagers who had assembled in the market at Dessie to request Imperial charity. Similarly, two marches of up to fifteen thousand destitute villagers from Wollo and Gonder to Addis Ababa were halted by roadblocks thirty kilometers from the capital. Rahmato interprets the peasants' convergence on centres of authority as a manifestation of a peculiarly Ethiopian tradition of supplication, which doubles as an act of silent protest. He wrote, 'both the "supplicants" and the men of authority for whose attention the convergence is made understand the deeper meaning of this symbolic performance.'⁹⁰ Such actions failed. As described above, the government, despite other warnings of the possibility of severe famine, had chosen to ignore it. Proud, afraid of losing face and not wishing anything to upset preparations for the lavish celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Organisation of African Unity, due to be held in May 1973, the government attempted to cover up the crisis.

The fourth process creating famine was the failure of famine relief. Just as market mechanisms could not be relied upon to distribute food resources in ways that would have prevented famine, so the evidence concerning Haile Selassie's notorious attempts to conceal the existence of famine in Wollo, suggested that the same was true

⁸⁸ See Keen, *Famine, Needs-Assessment and Survival Strategies*, p. 19

⁸⁹ Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies*

⁹⁰ Dessalegn Rahmato, 'Famine in peasant consciousness: aspects of symbolic culture in rural Ethiopia' (Addis Ababa University, July 1989), p. 15 cited in De Waal, 'Human rights', Chapter 6, p. 5

of institutional mechanisms. The inability of particular groups to command food reflected not simply a lack of purchasing power within the market but also a lack of lobbying power within national (and international) institutions.

By the time relief was initiated in northern Ethiopia, the first step in the fight against famine - acknowledging its existence - had been missed. Rahmato has written that 'if the cover-up of the famine revealed the callousness of imperial bureaucracy, the pervasive corruption that thrived throughout the famine in Wollo showed the greed of local officialdom'⁹¹ and goes on to cite examples of local officials selling food aid to private soldiers instead of distributing it to the needy; of disrupting efforts by charity organizations to carry out relief work; and of forcing peasants fleeing from the famine zones to pay a travel tax to enable passage through the famine affected areas.'⁹² *Africa Confidential* reported that the failure of the government to deal with the drought.

'showed up once again the inefficiency of the country's rural administration which is very largely controlled, not by the central government, but by local notables whose main aim is their own self-enrichment rather than the welfare of the rural population as a whole.'⁹³

Thus, even once acknowledged, there existed no functioning mechanisms for the responsible delivery of large-scale humanitarian relief. No preparations had been made to accommodate the growing stream of refugees who began arriving from the countryside at the roadside towns from at least March 1973. The local authorities responded haphazardly by erecting temporary shelters. Food supplies had not yet been established and the construction of latrines was begun through force of circumstance after the shelters were already occupied, resulting in a high incidence of enteric infections. Most camps lacked, until nearly the end of the year, resources and personnel which meant overcrowding, a lack of sanitation or routine hygiene and indifferent medical attention.

Equally slow to respond were the international aid agencies. It was estimated that the 'starvation crisis reached a peak in August 1973, when over 60,000 people were crowded round relief camps which could not deal with a third of their number,

⁹¹ Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies*, p. 102

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 102

⁹³ 'Ethiopia: the emperor's new clothes' *Africa Confidential*, 22 March 1974, p. 1

and many more flooded into the towns.⁹⁴ By the time foreign relief arrived some two months later, the camp populations had dwindled to 15,000, less than 1% of the affected population.⁹⁵ It was not clear how many of the original people had died and how many had returned to their villages or migrated out of the province. What was clear was the inability of particular groups to command accountability and lobbying power within international institutions. The appropriateness of the types of food relief imported and distributed by most external agencies was also called into question. These showed:

‘an overemphasis on providing protein, regardless of energy intakes, particularly since the local protein supplement ‘Faffa’ was available to meet any extra protein requirement. Examples of foods supplied by foreign agencies are sweetened milk, protein biscuits, baby foods packed in individual portions, protein ‘tonic’ and of course, dried skimmed milk. These were neither locally acceptable, nor suitable for treatment or prevention of malnutrition, nor indeed had most of them been requested.’⁹⁶

Misconceptions about the nature of famine were also apparent in the donors response, having important effects. This could be seen in the donor’s preoccupation with relief camps. In both the north and south, this resulted in increased mortality and most importantly, a deepening of destitution. In both instances, it reflected the donors inability to engage with, or take account of the political and economic processes creating famine. Misconceptions about the nature of famine could also be seen in the donor’s delayed intervention in the south. In their assessment of the Ogaden areas of the Harar province in 1974, Seaman and Holt discovered that five out of the six indices they had used to measure famine conditions showed high abnormality: mortality among the young was high; livestock losses were unusually heavy; grain prices had climbed up steeply while cattle prices were low or stable; there was a high rate of ‘rural’ out-migration; and an unusually large number of people were in debt. On the positive side, they found that there was no serious malnutrition among children in the area who were given anthropometric tests. The final verdict of the authors was that the area was not suffering from famine.⁹⁷ Famine was thus defined in terms of nutritional crises and little

⁹⁴ Holt & Seaman, ‘The scope of the drought’, pp. 1-8

⁹⁵ Mason & Hay & Holt, Seaman & Bowden, ‘Nutritional lessons’, p. 647

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 649

⁹⁷ Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies*, p. 122

attention was paid to the processes by which people had become and were becoming vulnerable. As a result little was done to pre-empt or prevent the 'event' which did indeed arrive in all its desperate and media-recognisable forms a few months later.

The above analysis has highlighted two key issues. Firstly that famine in Ethiopia in the 1970s had deep historical, political and environmental roots. In this respect, the famine can usefully be seen as a deepening of exploitative processes already existing in 'normal' conditions, a continuation and exaggeration of long-standing conflict over resources and a means of maximising the benefits of economic transactions. This implies that there may have been beneficiaries as well as victims of the famine and that the shock of drought can only be understood in terms of an entire political economy.

Secondly, that the international response to famine was inadequate: there was a serious delay in relief distribution in both the northern and southern regions succumbing to famine; and relief, when it did arrive, was often inappropriate. In part, this was due to structural difficulties. The Ethiopian government's continual denial of the famine exposed the dilemma that until a sovereign government appealed for help, the international agencies could not volunteer it. But it was also due to the way in which discourse about famine was generated and put to use. Famine was constructed by the donors as a disaster event, characterised by starvation. It was the fact of famine's occurrence, and particularly its biological manifestations, to which institutional attention was overwhelmingly directed. This donors failed to take vigorous action on relief until after the worst of the famine had been given widespread publicity, by the Jonathan Dimbleby television broadcast. Focused on the current crisis situation, donors tended to neglect the specificity of the context in which the famine had developed and the means by which it was progressing. In effect, famine was removed from its socio-economic and political context into the realm of biological regulation and control by humanitarian institutions. The following section looks specifically at CA's response to the famine and at how it positioned itself within this 'official discourse'.

2. Christian Aid and the 1971-75 Famine

2.1 *A background to Christian Aid and famine in Ethiopia*

CA's experience of famine in Ethiopia predated that of the 1970s. In 1966, the agency became involved in the Wag-Lasta famine, in northern Ethiopia. This section looks at how CA dealt with the challenge. Wolde Mariam has documented how the Wag-Lasta famine, like the Wollo famine that was soon to follow, was treated with official indifference and at times, open hostility and that it remained 'unknown to most Ethiopians, let alone to the outside world.'⁹⁸ Information on the impending disaster reached the Ethiopian Ministry of Interior in October 1965. No action was taken and by August 1966 the situation had deteriorated sharply with reports of severe starvation and deaths. In September 1966 the Emperor ordered the Ministry of Finance to make a sum of 220,000 Ethiopian Birr available to Wollo. This decision to do something was made almost one year after the information had reached the Ministry of Interior. People had already started dying. Wolde Mariam documents how even then official indifference and bureaucratic inefficiency resulted in an ineffective and irresponsible relief effort.⁹⁹

CA learnt of the Wag-Lasta famine in early 1967 when a photographer, Margaret Murray, contracted to take photos of Sudanese refugees in Western Ethiopia went to Wollo province and brought back disturbing photographs. It was partly as a result of her visit, that the famine became 'public' in England and other NGOs began to make their own inquiries. By April, through its' representative in Ethiopia, Rev'd Robert Huddleson, sponsored to assist and support the Inter-Church Aid Committee of the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia, CA received confirmation of the situation:

'without doubt there is a famine situation in Northern Ethiopia. The areas mainly affected are the provinces of Wag and Lasta ... the basic cause of the food shortage is a failure of the rains for nearly three years. This has been aggravated by disease and the extreme difficulty of communication ... estimates of the numbers who have died range from 2,000 to 20,000 and it is nearly impossible to get reliable statistics on the subject.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Wolde Mariam, *Rural Vulnerability*, p. 37

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 37-39

¹⁰⁰ R. Huddleson, 'Preliminary report: famine area in northern Ethiopia' (26 April 1967), (SOAS.CA/A/2.2)

The famine was 'public' yet CA faced difficulties as to 'how' to get involved. From the Public Health College at Gonder, via the British Embassy, CA learnt that, 'the area worst hit, Lasta, is remote, and the Ethiopian authorities, as a matter of deliberate policy, are denying that there is any crisis. Food supplies for the region are held up in Asmara and there is talk of speculation of the relief supplies by the District Governors.'¹⁰¹ Correspondence between the British Ambassador in Addis Ababa and H.I.H. Princess Ruth Desta in March 1967 indicated the major difficulty that faced northern NGOs wishing to intervene:

'before Oxfam can do anything, there needs to be an official request from the responsible body in Ethiopia. I have written to the Secretary of the Famine Relief Committee asking for his advice, but it may be that a request for help should come through the Ministry of the Interior.'¹⁰²

Similarly, CA had to wait upon a definite project proposal from the Ethiopian Inter-Church Aid Committee - which itself required implicit if not explicit imperial sanction - before it felt able to act. Even then, there was little strategic idea about what CA should be doing to help but more a feeling within the London office that CA should at least do something: 'as we seem to have brought the news of this famine to England, it would seem appropriate that we should do what we can.'¹⁰³ Indeed a policy conflict had already emerged between CA's London office and its representative in the field, Rev'd Robert Huddleson. Huddleson explained his inaction within the Inter-Church Aid Committee thus:

'- Ethiopians are proud people and like to deal with their own internal problems. They do not like to be forced by outside pressure to accept aid which they are not ready to ask for, or to use
- food is available in Addis Ababa, so we have not offered more at this stage because it too might lie in Addis Ababa for a long time
- money aid might also remain in the bank, or might be used for some other purpose than was intended
- no clear plan seemed to be formulated by the committee [Inter-Church Aid Committee] and no local personnel seemed to be mobilised to help.'¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Cited in R. Huddleson, 'Famine in Wollo province, Ethiopia: Wag and Lasta provincial areas' (n.d), (SOAS.CA/A/2.2)

¹⁰² The British Ambassador in Addis Ababa, letter to H.I.H. Princess Ruth Desta, (29 March 1967) cited in *ibid*.

¹⁰³ B. J. Dudbridge, letter to Christopher King (17 March 1967), (SOAS.CA/A/2.2)

¹⁰⁴ R. Huddleson, 'Famine in Wollo province, Ethiopia: Wag and Lasta provincial areas' (n.d), (SOAS.CA/A/2.2)

Huddleson felt that the Orthodox Church, CA's natural partner, was not yet capable of handling relief; that as the issue was not being pushed in Ethiopia, there was a danger of overriding local initiatives and imposing aid, a feature of unpopular 'missionary' endeavours of the past and a sensitive issue within the ecumenical movement¹⁰⁵; and that there was inadequate information on the situation: 'Inter-Church Aid has been trying since last Christmas to marshal the facts, but has encountered great difficulties ... in establishing the truth.'¹⁰⁶ However by April 1967, Huddleson reported that 'thinking is now on a constructive basis with an idea of future prevention rather than present cure, and there are now responsible people in the area who can direct and supervise any development work.'¹⁰⁷ Yet the conclusion drawn by Huddleson that 'Inter-Church Aid will be requested, when there is something positive to request it for' and that in the 'meantime if some have died or are dying, we can only be sorry that the means are not yet in our hands to prevent it,' stands as an honest but regretful statement on CA's operational capabilities in the late 1960s.

In 1970 CA was again made aware of a general food shortage in Ethiopia and of an official cover-up:

'in my discussions with members of the Inter-Church Aid committee and with the Minister of Interior, it became clear that ... the whole country is suffering from a general food shortage due to wide-spread crop failure caused by the lack of adequate rainfalls. ... Gojjam is supposed to be the major grain supplying province in Ethiopia. I was told that once there is a food problem in Gojjam, it is also a nationwide disaster. And that is what seems to be happening in Ethiopia now, although the government has so far been hesitant to say it publicly.'¹⁰⁸

CA responded with an emergency allocation of £1,000 channeled through the World Council of Churches.

CA's operational mechanisms in the late 1960s were incapable of dealing with the famine situations already emerging in Ethiopia. In the absence of effective channels of aid or a developed institutional structure for advocacy and education, CA was unable to respond either to the challenges of hunger or to official indifference. In many ways

¹⁰⁵ R. Huddleson, letter to B. J. Dudbridge (2 May 1967), (SOAS.CA/A/2.2)

¹⁰⁶ R. Huddleson, 'Famine in Wollo province, Ethiopia: Wag and Lasta provincial areas' (n.d), (SOAS.CA/A/2.2)

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Helmut Reuschle, 'Report on food emergency in Ethiopia' (27 August 1970), (SOAS.CA/A/11.8)

the famine of 1966 can be seen as the forerunner to the major famines of the 1970s.

Was CA any more capable a decade later?

2.2 *Christian Aid and the 1971-75 famine*

The first part of this section looks at the nature of CA's involvement in the 1970s famines. Focusing on the relief interventions in the Afar rangelands and Ogaden lowlands, the analysis aims to highlight how particular institutional practices were prioritised by CA above others, how such prioritisation was linked to the dominance of a particular discourse and what the implications were. The second part is driven by a desire to find out why CA positioned itself as it did.

The famine of 1971-73 was an acute tragedy for the Afar. The extent of the human impact can only be estimated, but Bondestam has suggested that as many as 30% of the Afar population perished.¹⁰⁹ In the aftermath of famine both the government and international agencies, including CA, became involved in three types of relief/rehabilitation programmes for the Afar. These were organised through the Livestock and Meat Board and consisted of: (i) road building on a food for work basis; (ii) construction of irrigation schemes on a food-for-work basis; and (iii) restocking. These programmes had been part of a longer-term Afar rangelands project which had been originally planned by the Livestock and Meat Board under the Haile Selassie regime, and to which the World Bank had made a funding commitment. The worsening situation in 1973 had called for rapid action and it was in response to this that the British government, CA and Oxfam responded.¹¹⁰ In effect, their involvement was in the nature of a holding operation to cover the period before the long-term project could commence. From 1975 the project was taken over by the World Bank and became known as the North East Rangelands Development Project. The short-term aim of the relief and rehabilitation programme was to provide food, on a food-for-work basis to 2,800 families continuously over two years; the longer term aim was to give the

¹⁰⁹ Lars Bondestam, 'People and capitalism in the north-eastern lowlands of Ethiopia' *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 12 (1974), p. 423

¹¹⁰ The programme was initiated in August 1973

opportunity for 1000 Afar families to switch out of a purely pastoral life to that of a sedentary livelihood on irrigated farming.¹¹¹ As a CA publication wrote about the scheme, 'Afar receive food and in return join in road construction, irrigation schemes and planting of food crops and fodder. These will help them towards more permanent settlement in new grazing areas unaffected by soil exhaustion.'¹¹²

This study does not question the genuine humanitarian aims of the programme, rather it aims to point out a number of characteristics in its approach which enabled particular models of understanding and action to be prioritised at the expense of alternatives. To begin with, the programme's approach was characterised by the very poor participation of the Afar. Tensions between the aid workers and the beneficiaries were soon to emerge:

'one of the saddest lessons I learned is that the cultural gap between educated Ethiopians and the pastoralist is so great that, in spite of goodwill felt initially by our project managers for the Afar, in the end they finished up with a total lack of sympathy for the people whom they were trying to help. This is a very serious problem in relation to the long term development of the area.'¹¹³

Lack of participation also created problems in relation to the effective targeting of the short-term relief - 'selecting families to receive the herds was a problem. Many were chosen from groups collected around food distribution centers, and those with the most mouths to feed were given priority.'¹¹⁴ Secondly, it was clear that despite the ambitious nature of the programme, there was,

'a paucity of data on livestock production, the sociology and welfare of the Afars and on the ecology of the area. ...In any case, much of the information available came from subjective observations taken over a short period of time and from fairly small samples.'¹¹⁵

In many ways the poor record on participation emerged as a direct result of this:

' the main problem encountered so far has been the very great length of time required for the holding of discussions and getting agreement with Afar Tribal authorities. This has been partially due to a much more strongly-held concept of tribal territory than had been expected from this semi-nomadic people.'¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ CA, 'Action for Ethiopia' (March 1974), (SOAS.CA/J/2)

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ Stephen Sandford, 'Report on Livestock and Meat Board' (2 January 1975), (OA.ETH.57)

¹¹⁴ Oxfam, 'Information: restocking of Afar herds - Wollo and Tigre Province' (25 January 1975), (OA.ETH.57)

¹¹⁵ ILCA, *NERDU Baseline Study Report* (ILCA: Ethiopia, 1 March 1980), p. 4

¹¹⁶ Oxfam, 'Third Report: food-for-work programme' (8 April 1974), (OA.ETH.31)

Thirdly, and in the absence of locally-based knowledge, the programme's approach tended to be defined by the hopes and aspirations of outsiders rather than by the reality of the situation. Optimistic and ambitious projections were generated. Typically these were revised downward as the nature of conditions emerged. Thus, while the original restocking programme envisaged the provision of cattle, camel, sheep and goats, the revised scheme provided only goats. Problems arose when the major source of supply, the Ogaden, dried up because of drought in that area. Consequently, even the revised scheme appeared over-ambitious and only limited geographical spread was achieved:

'we also failed to cover as wide an area as we had originally intended. We had hoped to carry out work in the Afar parts of 4 awrajas [province] in Wollo and one in Tigre. In the event our activities were almost totally confined to the one Aussa awraja [province] in Wollo. I also suspect that we did not get into the areas of greatest distress although this point is debatable.'¹¹⁷

Significantly, the process of revising over-optimistic projections led to an increased distortion of participation and accountability:

'registration has begun and is already presenting problems. Clearly the number of restocking units available will be much less than the numbers registered. The Livestock and Meat Board therefore has decided to keep secret the number of families it expects to restock until it has the final list of "legitimate qualifiers" and can determine what process of elimination will be introduced.'¹¹⁸

Doubts about the capabilities of the staff and this very process of qualification - 'it is not clear the Livestock and Meat Board people who are selecting the families are doing so through the traditional as well as the official Afar leaders'¹¹⁹ - further exposed the weakness of the scheme.

Finally, pursuing their own rationality, largely unhelpful policies were rendered surprisingly unobjectionable. The road building programme was described as, 'an expensive way of making inferior roads'¹²⁰ and a number of concerns raised:

'another point which worries us is whether anybody will make urgent repairs to the road if they are cut by the rains. Also, after the rainy season will the roads be maintained (and upgraded) as part of a long-term road network policy for

¹¹⁷ Stephen Sandford, 'Report on Livestock and Meat Board' (2 January 1975), (OA.ETH.57)

¹¹⁸ Peter Oakley, memo to Humphrey Hilton (29 October 1974), (OA.ETH.57)

¹¹⁹ Humphrey Hilton, memo to Toby Gooch (31 October 1974), (OA.ETH.57)

¹²⁰ Humphrey Hilton, memo on Peter Oakley's report of 30 December 1973 (December 1973), (OA.ETH.31)

Wollo or will they lapse for lack of funds in the Provincial budget for their maintenance.'¹²¹

To understand why sustainability and maintenance were not key issues one needs to appreciate the rationale that lay behind the road building:

'from my understanding of the project file, the principle purpose of this project is more associated with helping the Afar in a time of obvious disaster, than with the utility of the road building project.'¹²²

In this respect water-logged roads did not compromise the fundamental validity of the programme.

In the midst of the relief operation in the Afar rangelands, historically specific and locally based processes of famine were effectively ignored, without compromising the humanitarian goals of the operation. Knowledge of the specific circumstance of the Afar was essentially irrelevant to the apparent rationality of the programme. The information that gained dominance - typically focused on 'numbers', 'nutritional deficit', human and livestock 'mortality' - was that which supported the institutional practices - food-for-work, restocking, relief distribution. Conversely information about the socio-economic and political dimensions of the famine was marginalised. A focus on the physical needs of the Afar rendered the famine 'knowable', and hence 'do-able', through the application of a range of technologies. In this way famine was established as a subject of scientific knowledge, detached from the processes that actually underlay it. Moreover, the institutional practices applied to the famine had a legitimacy irrespective of the context in which famine arose. Thus the road-building programme could be judged according to the objectives of its own rationality and targets could be set according to the objectives of the operation rather than the reality of the social realm. The dominant view of the famine reflected a 'natural disaster' model. The programme's approach was essentially technocratic. Focusing on the Afars' physical state and on the precarious state of their natural environment, solutions were sought in physical rehabilitation and settlement.

It has been argued above that the fate of the Afar during the 1971-73 famine had

¹²¹ Humphrey Hilton, letter to Peter Oakley (2 July 1974), (OA.ETH.57)

¹²² Peter Oakley, letter to Toby Gooch (30 December 1973), (OA.ETH.31)

less to do with the direct effects of drought and soil erosion than with the direct erosion by the state of indigenous methods of resource conservation. It was the intrusion of commercial agriculture and the disruption of pastoral processes which caused the overgrazing, seen by some as a basic cause of plant degradation in pastoral areas, and not the activities of the nomads themselves.¹²³ The construction of an apolitical approach to the famine and a focus on the Afars' physical state, failed to address these underlying processes of asset transfer. In addition the dominance of particular institutional practices, linked to a 'natural disaster' discourse, and orientated towards settlement had crucial power effects. The remark of an aid worker exposed the form of this power:

'We have had many problems with the Afars who are still suspicious of our motives but I feel that once they see something growing they will realise what we are trying to do. The idea of work is alien to them, they are a proud race and they feel that handling a shovel is degrading. It is difficult for them to make the transition from nomads to farmer but this project is a good starting point.'¹²⁴

On the impact of such irrigated settlement schemes, Gamaledinn has written:

'in fact, it is difficult to describe the schemes properly as settlement schemes. They are, in reality, relief camps in perpetuity. These camps were set up temporarily, so the participants are not strictly settlers, yet they are unable to improve their lot sufficiently to make leaving the camp a viable option. Relief of this type has not assisted a return to normal life for these Afar pastoralists. Indeed, the settlers have become a part-time wage labour force on the growing number of state farms.'¹²⁵

In this respect the settlement schemes represented a continuation and deepening of processes initiated in the 1960s.

Institutional practices supported by CA were more reflective of an official discourse that constructed famine as a disaster event than of the actual needs and processes operating at the ground level. An exclusive focus on the Afars' physical state enabled the Afar to be isolated as targets of interventions from their wider socio-economic and political context. As a result, certain apolitical institutional practices achieved dominance, while other kinds of practices and other kinds of information were subordinated. The dominance of the technocratic and apolitical approach and its

¹²³ Gamaledinn, 'State policy and famine in the awash valley', p. 336

¹²⁴ Paul Millen, letter to Sarah Hayward (2 August 1974), (SOAS.CA2/A/5.10)

¹²⁵ Gamaledinn, 'State policy and famine in the awash valley', p. 338

concrete power effects can be seen in the following observation by a CA staff member:

'Clive [a CA representative in Wollo] refuses to get drawn into debate on whether it is right to get nomads to settle down.'¹²⁶ Ultimately the holding operation gave way to the larger programme financed by the World Bank - the North East Rangelands Development Project. The result was disappointing and reflected the fundamental weakness of the whole approach to the Afar rangelands. As the project completion report commented:

'the second lesson ... related to our lack of knowledge of pastoralists' behavior and the incentives needed to make them change traditional practices. As a result, the project failed to establish a system of controlled range use, which required the cooperation of pastoralists.'¹²⁷

While recognising that at the national level, 'the Afar people do not have the necessary political contacts to press their case and draw attention to their plight'¹²⁸ and that this explained their desperate situation and the paucity of relief, the programme failed to establish the representation of the Afar within its own corridors. Technical intervention, apolitical charity and top-down planning were more reflective of the official relief discourse than of the actual needs and processes operating at the ground level. Accountability was eschewed and hastily designed projects were implemented by engineers - usually outsiders - with little more than vague hopes about sustainability. The main result from the Afar project seems to have been that agencies learnt a bit more about the Afar and were seen to be 'doing something'. Undoubtedly they saved the lives of many, but equally evident was their failure to initiate sustainable or empowering development. As tensions deteriorated between the Afar and the military regime, tensions centered around development policies and perceptions of political survival, the bankruptcy of state policies and development initiatives in the rangelands was exposed. In June 1975, with the formation of the Afar Liberation Front and the instigation of revolt, an alternative violent solution to processes of marginalisation was initiated.

Was an alternative approach to the rangelands possible? Kloos has argued that

¹²⁶ Clive Wilson, letter to Sarah Hayward (7 June 1974), (SOAS.CA2/A/5.10)

¹²⁷ The World Bank, *Project Completion Report: rangelands development project* (The World Bank, 28 May 1991), p. vii-viii

¹²⁸ Stephen Sandford, letter to Toby Gooch (11 July 1973), (OA.ETH.31)

real possibilities for development from below based on active articulation with the political-economy of the Afar did exist. He presented a format less rooted in an apolitical developmental approach to pastoralism and more indicative of a political commitment to pastoral society. Indeed he argued that:

‘a framework of social and economic organization that aids the pastoralists in defining and achieving their objectives and restores a sense of responsibility and control over their own lands is a prerequisite for any development program.’¹²⁹

By addressing the political processes that were radically transforming the marginal Afar areas, Gamaledinn has however offered a pessimistic conclusion as to the possibility of state controlled development initiatives:

‘in an extreme form, then, the Ethiopian famine raises the possibility that the survival of the state in Africa (in its present form and with its ambitions for land control), and the survival of anything resembling the subsistence economies which evolved within the constraints of semi-arid Ethiopia, may be mutually exclusive.’¹³⁰

He also doubted the ability of aid agencies in recognising the importance of local conditions and needs.¹³¹ Certainly the actions of apolitical humanitarianism in 1973-74 proved inadequate at solving the problem of famine and the processes that underlay it. Moreover, in many ways, they actually contributed to famine’s intractability. In the Afar rangelands, CA failed to grasp the significance of the political formations underlying the crisis and proved ineffectual in alleviating processes of asset stripping.¹³² This failure was to be repeated in the Ogaden in 1975.

Rehabilitation in the Ogaden was based almost entirely around the idea of settlement on irrigated farmland, mostly along the Wabe Shebelle between Gode and Kelafo. The aim here is not to look at the individual technical problems of such rehabilitation - certainly the question of whether flood-fed agriculture was sufficiently reliable for permanent settlement does not appear to have been properly addressed - but at the political functions it served and at why CA positioned itself as it did. By early 1975 there were more than 80,000 Ogadenis living in 18 relief shelters close to the

¹²⁹ Kloos, ‘Development, drought, and famine in the awash valley’, p. 41

¹³⁰ Gamaledinn, ‘State policy and famine in the awash valley’, p. 340

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p. 342

¹³² Duffield has argued that, ‘it is difficult for aid agencies to grasp the significance of the organisational systems through which they operate, or the political formations with which they interact in a disaster zone.’ Duffield, ‘The symphony of the damned’, p. 174

Somali border. Africa Watch, a prominent human rights organisation, has documented how the camps served important political functions by undermining key aspects of the Ogadeni way of life:

'the shelters were run on military lines, with strict curfews enforced at 8.00 pm. Movement in and out was severely restricted -- making it impossible for each family to keep more than a handful of small animals. Traditional festivities were reportedly banned in some camps.'¹³³

The report goes on:

'the government had the explicit intention of turning the camp populations into settled farmers, rather than allowing them to return to a pastoral way of life. Another intention was to relocate camps well away from the Somali border.'¹³⁴

Senior staff in CA's aid administration were, at the time, aware of complexity and implications of the relief camps and commented in a travel report that,

'the government wishes to encourage settlement for good development reasons e.g. the ease of providing essential services and the availability of land suitable for irrigation along the Wabi Shebelle, but there are inevitably political considerations for encouraging a largely Somali population to settle in view of the security situation and the challenge from Somalia.'¹³⁵

Yet, perhaps stung by accusations of earlier inaction, the imperative to be seen to be doing something ultimately prevailed. Doubts were cast aside and the language of developmentalism overtook political analysis. CA's aid administrator concluded that, 'despite the negative comments, the settlement programme is basically a programme in which CA should become increasingly involved.'¹³⁶

Again, a focus on famine as a disaster event, characterised by starvation, enabled famine to be detached from the socio-economic and political processes in which it was embedded. Again apolitical humanitarianism had important local power effects. Essentially, CA and other international agencies became involved in a mopping-up programme, more supportive of government initiatives than of pastoral priorities. The government's hasty decision to close all relief shelters in the Ogaden in August 1976, at a time when President Siad Barre in Somalia was pledging his support for the cause of the 'liberation of the Ogaden' indicates the blatant relationship between political and

¹³³ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, pp. 73-74

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 73-74

¹³⁵ Vernon Littlewood & Sarah Hayward, 'Visit to Ethiopia' (14 - 25 October 1976), (CAO.AF/ME.23a)

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

humanitarian concerns. In deference to immediate national security concerns, humanitarian standards were lowered:

'with the closing of the relief camps the government has embarked on a further resettlement programme on the Wabi Shebelle 40 km north west of Gode. When the original plans were sketched out earlier this year ... agencies working in the relief camps were skeptical at the projected number for resettlements (which they felt was far too high) and criticised the lack of specific information about the proposed settlementthe Relief and Rehabilitation Commission went ahead ... there has been virtually no advance work done on the site prior to the arrival of the settlers.'¹³⁷

It was at this point that the agencies stepped in, with health programmes, irrigation programmes, housing and sanitation. In the fight against physical suffering, meaningful political analysis and strategic planning about the nature of actual 'suffering' was obscured. This had implications not just because of the manipulation of relief itself but also for longer term aims of rehabilitation and development. Just as in the Afar rangelands - where relief/development programmes were disrupted by conflict - so the settlement schemes in the Ogaden were abandoned by the settlers and their international supporters following the Somali invasion in 1977. In both cases, the experience of relief and development policies had contributed to the conflict: 'fear that the Ethiopian government was intent on undermining their traditional way of life was one factor that spurred many Ogadeni men into armed opposition to the government.'¹³⁸

A key scholar has argued that while the shortcomings of humanitarianism are, 'often conceived as a sort of gap between the reach of humanitarianism and the political nature of the problem, a gap that can only be filled when politicians play their "proper" role ... such a view is misconceived. Humanitarianism is a form of politics.'¹³⁹

The above analysis has shown how humanitarian interventions among the Afar nomads and Ogadeni herdsmen was political, exercising concrete local power effects. In Ethiopia, CA and other international agencies not only became enmeshed in national and local politics but imported their own humanitarian mode of power. As described above, this power was typically elaborated in support of the powerful at the expense of the weak.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, pp. 73-4

¹³⁹ De Waal, 'Social contract', p. 203

Why did CA position itself as it did? For this we need to turn to the influences - structural and ideological - that impacted on it. Until May 1973, CA's only partner in Ethiopia was the Orthodox Church. Experiences in 1966 had already exposed the weakness of this partnership and the evidence suggests that the situation had not changed by the 1970s. Following a visit to Ethiopia in November 1973, Vernon Littlewood, CA's aid administrator commented, 'I am not optimistic regarding the ability of the Orthodox Church to handle any relief goods that might be available.'¹⁴⁰ A few months later, a visitor from the World Council of Churches wrote:

'everywhere I found bewilderment that in this situation the Orthodox Church was not seen to be taking action. This is not to say that no action of any sort has been taken by the Church, but I emphasise everyone says they do not see evidence of the hand of the Orthodox Church in relief work.'¹⁴¹

The launching by the Orthodox Church Development Commission, in 1973, of a programme for the retraining of the Orthodox clergy, particularly in development problems, had not yet borne fruit and certainly the capacity of such clergy to play a role in relief was minimal. While the potential of the Orthodox Church as a development agent - 'there are 15,000 Orthodox churches and 200,000 priests in the country ... they are a powerful and influential group in society and could play a vital role in development'¹⁴² - was recognised, although even then as something of the future rather than the present, its potential as a relief agent was clearly limited. The isolation of the Orthodox Church compounded the problem. As Vernon Littlewood, CA's aid administrator commented:

'relations between the Orthodox hierarchy and the mission churches are cool. The Orthodox resent the activities of other churches in Orthodox areas and they argue that if these other churches were sincere in their claim that they want to spread the gospel, they would confine their attention to the Muslim and pagan areas of Ethiopia.'¹⁴³

Following the deposition of Haile Selassie, a further problem arose over the uncertain relationship between the Church and the new government, the Derg. On 18 March 1976, the Patriarch of Ethiopia, Abuna Teofowlos was deposed by the Derg and an

¹⁴⁰ Vernon Littlewood, letter to Stanley Mitton (22 November 1973), (CAO.AF/ME.20)

¹⁴¹ Stanley Mitton, 'Ethiopian Report: 19 December 1973 - 5 January 1974' (9 January 1974), (CAO.AF/ME.20)

¹⁴² Vernon Littlewood, 'Visit to Ethiopia: 11 - 19 August 1974' (30 August 1974), (CAO.AF/ME.20)

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

acting Patriarch was appointed.¹⁴⁴ While the Church itself was not persecuted under the Derg, it lost control of most of its land (through the land proclamation) and appeared to become paralysed in relation to the new political system.

With a weak and isolated partner, CA was operationally unable either to pre-empt the famine crisis or initially to respond. Indeed, an effective channel for response was not opened until the establishment of the Christian Relief Committee in Addis Ababa in May 1973 and it was not until August 1973 that CA made the first of what was then to become many grants to the Committee - £5,000. Thus despite knowledge of the Wollo famine through the World Council of Churches from about March 1973¹⁴⁵, CA did not respond until five months later, when the starvation crisis had reached its peak.

The Committee, which was to become CA's main partner in Ethiopia and the channel through which a large number of initiatives were funded, originated as an ad hoc group of local churches and missions who agreed to meet regularly to pool information and coordinate relief activities. Other agencies, including a number of secular agencies such as Concern, Save the Children Fund and Oxfam subsequently joined and to fill the gaps in the resources of member organisations, contact was made with overseas funding agencies. The funds received were allocated on the basis of decision by the Committee. During 1974 the Committee began to support members' rehabilitation activities and the geographical area of its coordination and support activities, originally concentrated in the northeast, was widened. In September, it was officially registered under a new name, Christian Relief and Development Association, with a mandate 'to promote and encourage relief and development activities in Ethiopia.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ The patriarch was accused of enriching himself, being a tool of the feudal system and showing no understanding towards the deprived and oppressed.

¹⁴⁵ It was World Council of Churches and Ethiopian Orthodox Church funds that enabled individuals from the University of Addis Ababa to carry out a field investigation of the situation in Wollo in early April 1974. The investigators brought back photographs, recorded interviews and eye witness testimonies, exposing the famine and prompting a widespread national call for official recognition and action. Wolde Mariam, *Rural Vulnerability*, pp. 43-47

¹⁴⁶ Borton, *The Changing Role of NGOs*, pp. 69-75

For donors, the Committee offered a valuable 'clearing house' facility enabling them to deal directly with one agency rather than several, thereby avoiding wasteful duplication of programmes or funding. Its coordinating function enabled the Committee to fill 'gaps' in assistance¹⁴⁷ and its ability to receive resources and allocate them between its member agencies increased the access of the smaller, locally-based NGOs to donor resources. By supporting the work of the churches and missions, with their established structures, the Committee was also able to provide assistance to people in their own areas. This on-the-spot help lessened the need for people to migrate to other areas and prevented the influx of people to the improvised and temporary shelters established on the main highway. The same structures helped to repatriate people to their areas from shelters using rehabilitative methods such as seed and oxen distribution.

Undoubtedly, the Committee was an important and effective partner. However, a picture quickly emerges, from the minutes of its meetings, of an organisation reacting to events and negotiating a path through conflicting priorities and interests. Meetings could become extremely heated as representatives of NGOs argued over their interpretation of conditions and needs in areas they all claimed to have visited recently. Inevitably, confusion over approaches remained. Such confusion was particularly evident with regard to the Ogaden famine where much criticism was leveled at the international agencies failure to get involved early enough. While reports were reaching the Committee from the end of 1973 about the deteriorating situation, a number of other considerations prevented early action by its member agencies. One was the absence of an infrastructure of Committee members in the Ogaden which made it difficult to work there. As senior staff members of CA's aid administration commented:

'the governments Relief and Rehabilitation Commission has criticised inter-governmental and voluntary agencies for failing to respond adequately to the situation in the Ogaden as they did two years ago following the drought in Wollo. There are several reasons for this and in particular the difficulty of working in an area without the agency infrastructure to support work.'¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Between May 1973 and August 1974, the Committee distributed E\$1.05 million to 17 member organisations. Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris & Angela Penrose, *The Ethiopian Famine* (Zed Books: London, 1990), p. 100

¹⁴⁸ Vernon Littlewood & Sarah Hayward, 'Visit to Ethiopia' (14 - 25 October 1976), (CAO.AF/ME.23a)

Another problem was the confusion over the definition of famine which compounded conflicting information. Information received by CA's aid administration highlighted this point:

'the general opinion before the results are put through the computer is that there is no famine in this part of Ethiopia but there has been severe drought which means that these nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples off the main roads, are perforce selling their cattle and their already low standard of living is threatened. The crux of whether this is or is not a famine in this part of Ethiopia depends on a definition of what is famine.'¹⁴⁹

Created once the disaster was already well under way, and so inevitably focused on 'updates' and the 'current situation', the Committee in the 1970s was ultimately trapped in an eternal present and it was difficult for it to take account of the past or to predict the future. The tendency was thus to equate the emergency of 'famine' with famine's final stage, that of mass mortality. A tendency compounded by the lack of operational capability to interpret or act any differently. In the Ogaden, the result in words of one journalist was 'fumbling and chaos'¹⁵⁰ and a slightly alleviated but still shocking repeat of conditions that had been so recently experienced in the north. Accountability was also a problem with the Committee. This tended to move upwards to the donors and member agencies rather than downwards to the victims. Assistance was conceived in terms of projects - fulfilling donors needs and budgetary requirements - rather than in terms of addressing the complex processes of famine. In this respect, the committee could be seen more as a channel for translating the priorities of the funders than as a forum for voicing the priorities of the victims:

'Mr Vernon Littlewood of CA has written indicating that his organisation would like to make a grant of £5,000 towards a specific project in Tigrai that would be of joint interest to the Orthodox Church, Mekane Yesus Church and the Roman Catholic Church ... The Executive Committee decided to contact the provincial social worker in Tigrai with the request that he present a suitable project proposal.'¹⁵¹

For CA in the 1970s, a commitment to social justice was far harder to operationalise in Ethiopia than a conventional 'supply' operation. CA's involvement, influenced by its partners operational capabilities and driven by the need to be seen to be

¹⁴⁹ Jeanne Townsend, memo to Sarah Hayward (nd), (SOAS.CA2/A/5.13)

¹⁵⁰ Jonathan Dimbleby, 'Time passed and no one called' *The Guardian*, 23 February 1976

¹⁵¹ CRDA minutes (6 August 1974), (SOAS.CA2/A/6.4)

'doing something', ultimately constituted an apolitical approach, more reflective of a natural disaster discourse. However, alongside structural weaknesses it was also clear that CA's pursuit of a social justice mandate committed to partnership with civil society was in itself under-theorised. CA's concerns for civil society were framed within an apolitical discourse. In its publications, the focus was on feudal agrarian relations, the absence of wells and simple irrigation systems, of roads and transport, of storage and health facilities.¹⁵² What was not subject to scrutiny were the political processes that were radically transforming marginal areas. It has been argued above how in the Afar and Ogaden lowlands, CA's involvement reflected a distancing from indigenous political processes and a crucial lack of political analysis or engagement.

3. Groping For a New Role

As CA emerged from its experiences in the Ethiopian and Sahelian famines of the 1970s, a number of its senior staff were aware of crucial limitations in its approach. In Ethiopia, it was felt that CA had not been able to react to the crisis early enough and that its intervention, determined by established channels and patterns of allocation, had been inadequate at addressing the underlying processes of famine or reaching the poorest in the community. Some senior staff felt that not enough questions were being asked, that the organisation lacked a strategic approach to problems of poverty and vulnerability and that as a result the agency had been unable to fulfill its social justice mandate.¹⁵³ In particular, five key lessons were drawn.

Firstly, CA became aware of the need to move beyond government definitions of the relief problem; of when and where relief distributions were acceptable and possible. In this respect, the Ethiopian famine exposed the strategic problem surrounding the principle of sovereignty, and the deference owed to it. In Ethiopia, the Imperial regime shaped the relief agenda fundamentally by at first ignoring and then denying the existence of famine. By the time famine was publicly exposed, thousands

¹⁵² CA, 'Record of a Year' (October 1972-September 1973), (SOAS.CA/J/1)

¹⁵³ CA, 'Questions for consideration by the Africa Regional Committee' (8 July 1977), (CAO.DIR.108)

were already congregated in relief camps and the final stage of the famine process, manifest in starvation, had been reached. It was to this media disaster, exposed by Jonathan Dimbleby, that agencies like CA finally responded.

Secondly, CA began to be more aware of the need to look beyond the logistical provision of relief to its implementation. Such a responsibility would involve not just establishing the capacity to reach the marginalised, but also ensuring the accountability of the intervention, not to the western public or media, but to the victims of famine. Clearly, this would depend on a number of operational factors - the ability to access information, the existence of infrastructure (roads), the capabilities of local partners. It would also depend on a political commitment to adopt a more holistic approach to the famine process, to move beyond simply allocating relief to conveniently accessible areas once famine mortality occurred, and toward a concern with pushing relief through to all areas of need in a bid to halt the extended processes of famine before the final stage of mass mortality was reached. The issue of accountability to the victims of famine was a crucial lesson for CA.

Thirdly, interventions such as those mandated in Ethiopia, needed to address processes of development. In Ethiopia, famine were fueled by long-standing conflicts over economic resources, exacerbated by a particular pattern of uneven development that generated growing pressures. The lessons from the Afar rangelands, Ogaden lowlands and Wollo highlands was that CA needed to engage with the processes creating famine, rather than simply allocating relief to some of the poorest groups once they had descended into destitution. In particular, CA's failure to take account of the essential development situation of communities seriously impacted on prospects of linking relief to development.

A fourth, and related, lesson for CA was the need to address the wider political-economy underpinning famine. The most striking characteristic about the victims of the famine in 1971-75 was not their poverty but their near-total lack of rights or political muscle within the institutions of the state. It was this that exposed them to the processes of famine and left them with little access to famine relief. The famine in Ethiopia was not just 'policy' failure, it had a real political economy and served important functions.

That there were, overall, adequate food supplies in Ethiopia implies that thousands would not have died if the government had prevented hoarding, effected a programme of far reaching economic and social change and, when food shortages occurred in one area, redressed the balance by transferring food from surplus regions. Finally, CA drew lessons about the politics of relief. Concerns arose about whether the Ethiopians distributed relief supplies properly and equitably and whether relief was being diverted to the local officialdom or military. In the Ogaden lowlands, in particular, the experience was that humanitarianism itself, as constituted in CA's interventions, had been a form of politics.

In the 1970s famine, CA's discourse on famine and actions in relief reflected the conventional neutral approach of 'food availability decline' theories. Famine was identified in terms of nutrition and relief was focused on 'numbers' and 'needs'. The processes by which people had become vulnerable to drought and ultimately famine were not addressed. The lessons drawn from the experience however, reflected an alternative understanding of famine's nature and causes and in particular a recognition that a more strategic analysis and approach was needed both to relief and development. Chapter 1 has shown how institutionally, the mid-1970s were crucial years for CA involving major reassessments of its priorities and capabilities. Experiences in Ethiopia played a major part in these debates, bringing to the surface concerns (originally highlighted in the late 1960s) about CA's traditional partnerships, its relations with states and its ability to anticipate rather than react to events. Horrific images of the relief camps in the Sahel and Ethiopia, along with a growing sense of inadequacy focused attention on issues of partnership, accountability and effectiveness. In particular, the frailty of the agency's ability to pursue a social justice mandate had been exposed. It was in response to such internal questioning and debate that the Sinclair Committee was appointed and recommendations made to reorganise CA's overseas aid policy. As a result, the aid department was strengthened, attempts were made to diversify and extend its partnerships and a more strategic targeting of the vulnerable and marginalised was defined. Reflective of emerging theoretical paradigms, remedies were sought in a commitment to civil society, to partnership and accountability. Whether CA was able to

operationalise such a new role in Ethiopia will be taken up in the following chapters.

Table 3.2 History of Drought and Famine in Ethiopia

circa 831-849	'great tribulation hath come upon our land and all our men are dying of the plague, and our beasts and cattle have perished, and God hath restrained the heavens so that they cannot rain upon our land.' ¹⁵⁴
1066-72	Failure of the Nile flood, with ambassadors from Egypt being sent to Ethiopia to request the king to allow the river to flow. This implies drought in Ethiopia, which supplies 90% of Nile waters.
circa 1131-45	'famine and plague broke out in the land, and the rain would not fall on the fields, and great tribulation came upon the people.' ¹⁵⁵
1252, 1258-59, 1272-73, circa 1314-44	Recorded as famine years by Pankhurst but no details given.
circa 1540	'Famine of cereals due to lack of rain.' ¹⁵⁶
1543-44	'a great famine, a punishment sent on the country by the glorious God.' ¹⁵⁷
1559-62	Rain failures for three years following the killing of the Emperor Geladius, especially in Harer. 'Prices of grain, salt and cattle rose to unprecedented levels' and cases of cannibalism were reported. ¹⁵⁸
1611	Recorded as a famine year by Pankhurst, with no details given.
1625-28	Unusually large locust swarms precipitating famine in northern provinces. Mass migration of victims in search of relief.
1634-35	More locust plagues precipitating famine, with accompanying widespread disease epidemics.
1650, 1653	Recorded as famine years by Pankhurst, with no details given.
1668	'a great famine' ¹⁵⁹ with exceptional grain price inflation and widespread livestock deaths.
1678, 1700, 1702	All listed as famine years by Pankhurst but no details given.
1706	Famine affecting the entire country, with starving peasants pleading for aid at the imperial court in Gonder.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Pankhurst, *The History of Famine and Epidemics in Ethiopia Prior to the Twentieth Century* (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission: Addis Ababa, 1985), p. 11

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 11

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 28

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 33

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 34

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 51

1747-48	Two successive plagues of locusts that 'covered the land like a fog' ¹⁶⁰ destroy crops. Influenza epidemics follow.
1752	More famine deaths reported.
1772-73	Famine referred to in chronicles as <u>quachne</u> , literally 'my thinness.' ¹⁶¹
1788-89	A further famine outbreak 'over all the provinces', causing 'great distress.' ¹⁶²
1796	Locust plagues destroying crops in many districts.
1800	More famine deaths
1812	Locust plagues causing 'partial famine' ¹⁶³ , with several thousand deaths in Hammassien.
1828-29	Famine in Shewa following rain failures which destroyed both grain and cotton crops. Also widespread cattle deaths and a cholera outbreak. High food prices, and voluntary enslavement by the peasantry.
1865	Severe famine in Tigray and Gonder.
1888-92	The most devastating famine ever recorded in Ethiopia, which affected virtually the whole country. The entire period was unusually hot and dry, and a rinderpest epidemic carried off 90% of cattle. Locusts, caterpillars and rats also infested the country at various times. Suicide and cannibalism occurred, and wild animals attacked dying people. About one third of the population is estimated to have perished.
1895-96	Failure of winter and spring rains.
1899-	An unrecorded drought manifested through a fall in the 1900 level of lake Rudolph. The Nile flood was also unusually low that year.
1913-14	Widespread drought in North Africa, with the effect on Ethiopia indicated by a very poor Nile flood (the lowest since 1895). The price of grain rose thirty-fold in the north of Ethiopia, and there was great starvation in Tigray.
1921-22	A similar drought to that of 1895-96. Complete failure of the rains between October 1920 and May 1921.
1932-34	The level of Lake Rudolph dropped, implying a serious decrease in rainfall in southern Ethiopia. Victims fled to British Somaliland, where relief camps were set up to receive them.
1953	Undocumented drought in Wollo and Tigray.
1957-58	More than 100,000 people in Wollo and Tigray are reported to have died following drought and locust attacks.
1964-66	Virtually undocumented drought and famine said to be more widespread than that of 1972-74.
1972-74	Complete failure of the spring rains following two or more years of low

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 51

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 52

¹⁶² *ibid.*, p. 53

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 53

rainfall. Northern, eastern and southeastern parts of the country affected. The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission estimates the number of dead at about 200,000 for Tigray, Wollo and northern Shewa. Death also reported in Harerghe.

1977-79

Poorly documented drought and famine in Wollo, Tigray, Gonder and northern Shewa, following failures of 1977 spring rains and main rains of 1978. More than 2 million people estimated to be affected, and relief operations undertaken.

1983-85

Rain failure beginning in north and spreading to most parts of the country by 1984. Relief operations mounted by insufficient to prevent mass migration and widespread deaths by mid-1984. Massive international response following media coverage towards end of 1984. UN estimates death toll of 1 million, with more than 8 million victims requiring assistance. Relief operations continue into 1986.

Sources include: Richard Pankhurst, 'The great Ethiopian famine of 1888-92' *University College Review*, 1 (1961), pp. 90-103; Richard Pankhurst, 'The history of famine and pestilence in Ethiopia prior to the founding of Gonder, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 10 (1972), pp. 37-64; Richard Pankhurst, *The History of Famine and Epidemics in Ethiopia Prior to the Twentieth Century* (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission: Addis Ababa, 1985); C. A. Wood, 'A preliminary chronology of Ethiopian droughts' in Dalby et al (ed.), *Drought in Africa* (International African Institute: London, 1977); Bahru Zewde, 'A historical outline of famine in Ethiopia' in Hussein (ed.), *Rehab*, pp. 52-58; & Wolde Mariam, *Rural Vulnerability*

Chapter 4

THE 1983-85 ETHIOPIAN FAMINE: 'FUNCTION' RE-EXAMINED

In 1984 a massive intervention was launched by the international community to relieve famine in Ethiopia. The 1980s famine was on a far larger scale than a decade earlier, with an estimated 400-600,000 deaths¹, and happened at a time when a profound shift in the operating environment for relief interventions was occurring. In particular, the relief efforts, to an unprecedented degree, relied upon NGOs as channels for the provision and distribution of assistance. The following two chapters look at CA's ability to deal with these challenges.² In particular they look at the evolution and positioning of CA's mandate; at how the experiences of the past informed the present; and at how both influenced the framework for future action.

The 1980s Ethiopian famine is important for a number of reasons. Firstly it was a famine of political origin, the result of internal war and disputed sovereignty. The humanitarian crisis was concentrated in the northern regions of Eritrea and Tigray, areas where the counter-insurgency strategy of the central government had been to directly target civilian populations and their food security systems. In this respect, the famine represented a 'protracted political crises' or 'complex emergency'³, in which the state had neither the capacity nor the will to provide emergency assistance. Secondly, the famine represented a spectacular example of manipulated humanitarianism. The international donors, by ignoring the political nature of the emergency and hence the political dimensions of the related humanitarian crisis; and by failing to acknowledge that there were winners as well as losers, exposed themselves to the charge that what they were doing was reinforcing inequalities of power; becoming part of the problem and not the solution. In this respect the central government was allowed to shape the relief agenda to support its own political objectives and was left largely unchallenged. Finally, the famine saw the development of a radically different form of humanitarian

¹ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, pp. 173-6

² The focus will be on Eritrea and Tigray although the famine, at times, affected other parts of Ethiopia including much of the east and south (it is worth noting that the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front included parts of Gonder and Northern Wollo in its definition of Tigray).

³ For an analysis of these terms see Duffield, 'Complex emergencies', p. 38

action in the cross-border operation in to Eritrea and Tigray. This was organised through an ecumenical consortium, the Emergency Relief Desk (ERD), officially set up in 1981. The operation arose from the problem of accessing humanitarian relief in the context of internal war. Based in Khartoum, the consortium channeled assistance across the border into rebel-held territory in neighboring Eritrea and Tigray from 1985 to 1991, without the permission of the Ethiopian authorities.

The ERD represented a crucial episode in the evolution of CA's approach to relief and development in Africa. Moreover as a consortium involved with indigenous political and humanitarian structures and committed to the politically disadvantaged within the international arena, the ERD was at the forefront of more general calls within the international community for a new framework for humanitarian assistance in 'complex emergencies'. In this respect, the ERD lay at the center of a profound change in the nature of international relations:

'from a cold war system based upon nation-state sovereignty to an emerging balance of power characterised by the enhanced role of NGOs, in which such things as the principle of non-interference, especially in relation to humanitarian aid, is less firmly supported.'⁴

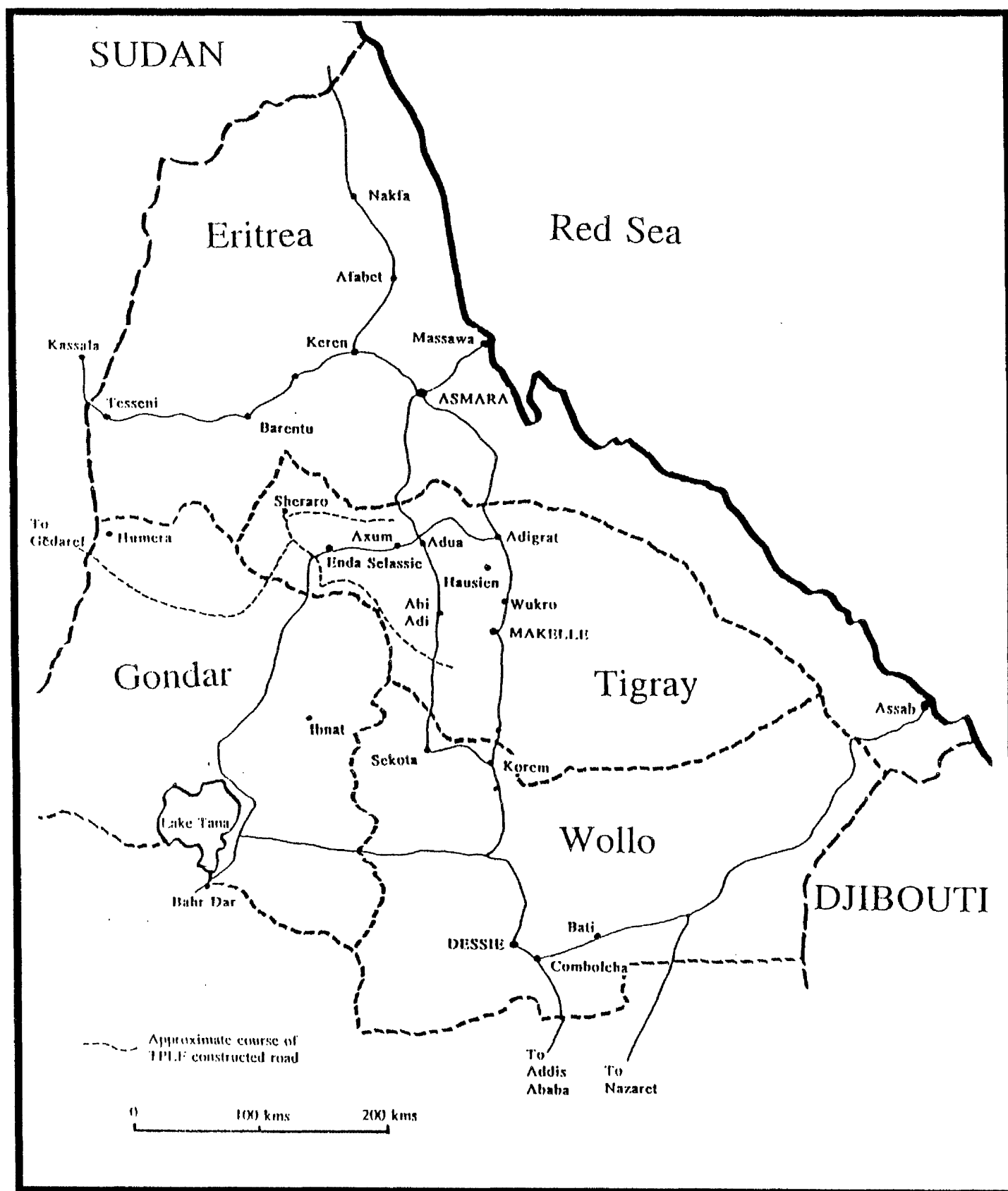
The history of ERD provides a crucial insight into the changing nature of North-South relations in the 1980s and the key debates within the international aid community.

This chapter begins by developing the concept of war in the theorisation of famine and looks at the relationship between conflict and food security. It argues that the 1983-85 Ethiopian famine was caused largely by a set of counter-insurgency strategies implemented by the Ethiopian army and that relief was manipulated on the government side to reinforce the political and economic marginalisation of the 'losers'. It then turns to the international political and legal framework for mitigation of the crisis, and looks at how issues of sovereignty and access created a particular knowledge of the disaster around which a narrative of relief was constructed. The aim of the chapter is to look again at discourses on famine, disaster relief and development; to analyse the power effects of such discourses; and to examine the implications for

⁴ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 9

alternative models of understanding and action. Such a model, provided by the cross-border operation is examined in the following chapter.

Map 4.1: Northern Ethiopia 1983-85



Source: John Borton, *The Changing Role of NGOs in the Provision of Relief and Rehabilitation Assistance: case study 3 - northern Ethiopia and Eritrea* ODI Working Paper 76 (ODI: London, May 1994), p. 12

1. War and Famine

'In a non-war context ... it is unlikely that drought alone would have produced frank starvation of the scale that occurred during the famine-disaster of 1984/85. Rather, it was a combination of war and drought that produced a crisis of such intensity, and specifically the fact that conflict either destroyed or curtailed people's options for physical survival. Further the government's use of counterinsurgency warfare, including direct attacks against the civilian population in rural areas, also acted as a catalyst for the decline of the countryside to starvation, and starvation-associated deaths.'⁵

Ethiopia in the 1980s provided a spectacular example of famine caused directly by government policies and human rights abuses. This section looks at the nature of the famine, at its functions and effects. In particular, it analyses the process of 'militarised asset transfer'⁶ from the politically weak to the politically strong that characterised the famine. The discursive construction of the famine as a disaster event, characterised by starvation, is challenged and an alternative interpretation of the 'disaster' as a protracted 'permanent emergency', embedded in a specific historical context and requiring political action to address issues of political survival is presented.⁷

In 1983, as in 1971-75, the evidence suggests that while one cannot deny the adverse effects of bad weather, it was structural factors (social, economic, and political) that created famine. The evidence from rainfall data and food production reveal that drought may not have been as prevalent during the 1980s as it was often presented and that while the severity of the drought in 1984 was apparent, the rains of 1983 were not abnormally low.⁸ A survey done among Tigrayan refugees in Sudan in 1985 found that 'their highest yields in the last ten years occurred in 1982-83.'⁹ Similarly grain prices failed to support an account of repeated and widespread drought, but of a highly localized famine in Tigray, spreading out into Wollo and Gonder in 1984 and 1985.

One analyst argued:

'the droughts of 1980-3 were unremarkable; ... localized surpluses existed; ... if normal processes of redistribution of food had been allowed to occur, there would have been no famine. 1984 was a drought year of unusual severity, it is

⁵ Barbara Hendrie, 'Relief aid behind the lines: the cross-border operation in Tigray', in Macrae & Zwi (eds.), *War and Hunger*, p. 126

⁶ See De Waal, 'War and famine in Africa', pp. 33-40

⁷ For an analysis of the terms 'permanent emergency' and 'political survival,' see Duffield, 'NGOs, disaster relief and asset transfer in the Horn', pp. 131-157

⁸ Borton, *The Changing Role of NGOs*, p. 21; Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, pp. 133-139

⁹ Clay & Holcombe, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine*, p. 192

true -- but had the famine not already been in train, and had the artificial famine-creating actions not continued, major famine could have been averted.¹⁰

Socio-economic factors that had historically exposed the Ethiopian highland farmer to natural disaster were as prevalent in the 1980s as they had been in the 1970s. These included the extreme exploitation of the peasantry by the ruling classes. While the Wollo famine of 1973-74 had played a key role in precipitating the downfall of Haile Selassie in 1974, in many ways the revolution and rural policy developments that followed reaffirmed the alienation of the north from the national political economy.¹¹ The revolution that had toppled the Haile Selassie regime and shattered the class basis for his rule had been an urban phenomenon led by teachers, soldiers, young bureaucrats, and students.¹² In this respect, as McCann argued:

'the revolution and policies that have emanated from it confirm a longer trend in which political issues affecting local economies in places like northern Wollo are less a reflection of local conditions than of development in the new political economy's modern sector. It is not surprising, therefore, that famine and vulnerability to famine in post-revolution Ethiopia appear to be more severe than the rural crises experiences in northern Wollo earlier in this century.'¹³

One of the key reforms of the new government, the land reform proclamation of 1975¹⁴, allowed the peasantry to own their land, but failed to transform peasant agriculture or to provide for the development of productive forces. The reform allowed tenants to escape those relations but it did not resolve their capital shortages which were by far the more crippling restriction of their participation in agriculture. At the same time, the highland peasant had to meet the new demands of the revolution and the state: increased rural taxation: and the excessive demands of the national marketing parastatal, the Agricultural Marketing Corporation.¹⁵ A range of other rural policies further

¹⁰ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 134

¹¹ Haile Selassie was deposed on 12 September 1974 and replaced by a provisional military government, the Derg

¹² McCann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia*, p. 205

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 205

¹⁴ The main points of the proclamation were: all land was to be jointly owned by the Ethiopian people; every person was entitled to cultivate up to 10 hectares, depending on the productivity of the soil; peasant-landowner relationship was abolished; all farmers were to become members of peasant associations. Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988), pp. 157-194

¹⁵ This was set up in 1976. A fixed quota had to be met by all farmers regardless of the size of their harvest. The price for each type of grain was centrally fixed - in 1984, the fixed price was only about 20% of the free market price in Addis Ababa and stayed at the same level for 8 years despite inflation on the open market. Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 159

weakened the peasant's subsistence economies. These included: restrictions on trade which crippled the rural marketing system and stemmed the essential flow of grain from surplus to deficit areas; restrictions on money lending and rural credit; the restriction of wage labour on smallholdings, effected by the land reform of 1975 this prevented crucial seasonal labour migration; and coercive labour programmes on communal plots and state farms which had a deterrent effect on peasant food production and supply.¹⁶ Restrictions on trade¹⁷ and migration and the contraction of credit, meant that excessive taxes were paid through divestiture of farmers' productive assets (oxen, seed, tools), leading to severe structural constraints on production. In effect, the shape of vulnerability in the northern highlands of Ethiopia remained.

Yet, on their own, the Derg's rural policies did not explain why the drought of 1983-84 in the northern provinces became more than a 'normal' period of hardship. To understand why famine occurred, it is necessary to turn to an account of the conduct of war. Essentially the famine of the 1980s occurred against a backdrop of three internal wars fought against the Derg: in Eritrea by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF); in Tigray by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF); and in Oromo regions by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). This analysis will concentrate on the war in Eritrea and Tigray as it was these areas that were most affected by the famine and became the focus of the cross-border operation. The OLF insurgency will be dealt with less rigorously.

The origins of the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia can be traced back to 1952 when, with the approval of the United Nations and against the popular claim of the

¹⁶ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, pp. 159-169

¹⁷ An example of the impact of government trade restrictions relates to the United Nations Children's Fund's cash-for-food programme in Ethiopia, 1985-6. This programme assumed that, in certain areas, hardship was caused by a lack of purchasing power, rather than a lack of food per se. It was therefore expected that recipients of cash would be able to tap distant regional markets where food could still be obtained at reasonable prices. At one site, farmers traveled up to 100 kilometres to purchase grain, only to have it confiscated on the way home and to be accused of illegal trading. 'As a result, most recipients were forced to stay home and to contend with local inflationary effects of the cash transfer scheme.' Patrick Webb, Joachim von Braun, Yisehac Yohannes, *Famine in Ethiopia: policy implications of coping failure at national and household levels* (International Food Policy Research Institute: Washington, DC, 1992), p. 76

Eritreans to independence, Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia.¹⁸ During the following years such federal rights as Eritrea had were slowly eroded. In 1961 Eritrea was formally annexed by Ethiopia and its parliament abolished. In September 1961, a three decade long struggle for independence was launched when a contingent of eleven fighting men formed the first armed forces of the Eritrean Liberation Front. The government responded with a brutal counter-insurgency strategy.¹⁹ Civilians were regular targets of violence whether from punitive army patrols, indiscriminate requisitioning of food or forced relocation in fortified villages. Such actions led to an increasing exodus of refugees; by May 1967, there were 25,500 Eritreans in the Sudan²⁰; and in 1970, a renewed Ethiopian offensive resulted in a further 16,700 seeking refuge across the border.²¹ In the mid-1970s, the political leadership of the armed struggle for independence passed from the Eritrean Liberation Front to a break-away movement, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Between 1975 and 1977, the liberation movements succeeded in bringing the greater part of Eritrea under their control leaving the capital, Asmara and the sea-port of Massawa, still under Ethiopian control, in a virtual state of siege. This balance of power changed from mid-1978 when, with a large peasant army and sophisticated armaments provided by the Soviet Union, the Ethiopian military unleashed an all-out offensive.²² The Ethiopians reoccupied all major cities and towns of Eritrea and dismantled the political, economic and social structures set-up by the Eritreans. The EPLF was pushed back to the Sahel district on the Sudan border.²³

¹⁸ Eritrea, an Italian colony from 1890 to 1941, came under British administration until 1952. The extent to which areas of Eritrea were integrated into Ethiopia before the colonisation, and therefore the strength of Haile Selassie's claim to the territory once the Italians had been ousted, is disputed by historians.

¹⁹ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, pp. 42 - 53

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 44

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 46

²² The defeat of Somalia in the Ogaden in the summer of 1977 freed up Soviet equipment and supplies for the Derg forces

²³ The government offensive resulted in the near collapse of the Eritrean Liberation Front. During 1980, open fighting developed between the EPLF and Eritrean Liberation Front which resulted in 1981, in the latter being forced out of Eritrea and into Sudan. The Eritrean Red Cross and Red Crescent Society - the relief wing of the Eritrean Liberation Front - was confined to refugee work in Sudan from that date onwards, and the Eritrean Relief Association - the relief wing of the EPLF - became the sole relief association operating within Eritrea.

Between May 1978 and July 1979, a total of five offensives were launched by the Ethiopian forces in Eritrea. These were characterised by massive and sustained bombing and the deployment of a large infantry. Between 1978 and 1980, 70-80,000 people died as a result of the war and the refugee population in Sudan doubled to nearly 420,000.²⁴ At the end of 1979 and during the early part of 1980, the EPLF successfully counter-attacked, pushing back the Derg's troops. The government responded in 1982 by launching its brutal Red Star Campaign. Over 120,000 ground troops were deployed, alongside cluster and phosphorus bombs.²⁵ The campaign failed although an Offensive which lasted from March until August 1983 in Barka and Senhit provinces, brought the Derg some gains. For the next four years, war was fought around a fairly stable front line running through Sahel Province to the east of Nacfa. Throughout there were regular air attacks on EPLF positions and villages in EPLF-held areas.²⁶ In March 1988, the balance shifted in the EPLF's favour when they captured the strategic government garrison in Afabet and went on to take Barentu, Tesseni and Agordat. The government responded with a brutal counter-offensive which restored the balance of power until February 1990, when the EPLF took the port of Massawa. This initiated the siege of Asmara which finally led to the surrender of the garrison in Asmara in May 1991. The EPLF emerged first as the Provisional Government of Eritrea and then, after the United Nations supervised independence referendum of April 1993, as the Government of Eritrea.

In Tigray, conflict can be traced back to 1975 and the formation of the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). The TPLF wanted an end to the military dictatorship of Mengistu. Unlike the EPLF, it was not seeking separation from Ethiopia but power within it and an end to the centralized Shewan Amhara dominance.²⁷ Between 1975 and 1983, the Ethiopian government launched seven major offensives in Tigray, most of

²⁴ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 34

²⁵ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 118

²⁶ Borton, *The Changing Role of NGOs*, p. 19

²⁷ Amhara dominance went back to the 1880s, when Tigray was incorporated into Ethiopia by the Emperor Menelik.

which occurred during critical months in the agricultural cycle.²⁸ During the 1980 offensive in central Tigray, the army destroyed grain stores, burned crops and pastures, killed livestock, burned houses, enforced the collection of taxes and contributions including 'arrears' and displaced about 80,000 farmers.²⁹ In 1982, the TPLF, in coordination with the newly formed Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement launched its own offensive in Tigray and northern Wollo and by late 1984, TPLF forces controlled up to three-quarters of the rural areas of Tigray.³⁰ In 1988, the EPLF victory at Afabet contributed to a weakening of the Derg forces positions in Tigray and from March to June, the TPLF took control of several garrison towns. The Derg responded with intensive air attacks on the towns, indiscriminately targeting civilians and relief agencies. The TPLF implemented a tactical withdrawal to the rural areas. In early 1989, the TPLF merged with the Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement to form the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front and launched an offensive which succeeded in taking the main towns in Tigray including, for the first time, the capital Makelle.³¹ In August 1989, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front forces advanced southwards into Shewa and at the end of May 1991 moved into Addis Ababa. The Front then established itself as the Transitional Government of Ethiopia.

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) started its armed liberation struggle in 1974. The OLF was very much a junior partner in the wars against the Derg. While Oromo-speakers were the largest 'nationality' in Ethiopia, making up around 40% of the population³², they had no clear territorial basis, living in 12 of Ethiopia's former administrative regions but only forming the majority in one. Welch has argued:

'constructing an Oromo sense of unity for the struggle against the Derg was considerably complicated by the regime's land reform in the south, which won it considerable support, and by differences between Christians and Muslims. A

²⁸ Barbara Hendrie, 'Do We See Famine As It Is? The experience of people living in TPLF-controlled areas during the 1985 famine' (Inter-Africa Group: Addis Ababa, 1995)

²⁹ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 142

³⁰ The Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement had been formed in 1981 and was militarily active in Wollo and Gonder.

³¹ The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front brought Oromo and Derg POWs together with the largely Amhara Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement into a grand coalition.

³² P. T. W. Baxter, 'The creation & constitution of Oromo Nationality' in Katsuyoshi Fukui & John Markakis (eds.), *Ethnicity & Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (James Currey: London, 1994), pp. 167-201

“politically coherent” Oromo identity proved difficult to develop - and, as a consequence, so did an effective organization.³³

Such an argument should however be treated with caution. Other writers have argued that Oromo nationality is a political fact which has to be taken into account.³⁴ What was evident, during the 1970s and 1980s, was that the Oromo's struggle lacked the cohesion of the northern provinces.

By 1983, in Eritrea and Tigray, there were at least 250,000 war casualties and around 500,000 civilians had sought refuge in Sudan, while countless more had been internally displaced.³⁵ War and instability have historically been a major cause of famine in Ethiopia.³⁶ What was arguably different in the 1980s was the extent to which the rural people and their food security systems became a consistent and direct target of the actions of the Ethiopian army. It was the extreme nature of warfare that proved so destructive. Counter-insurgency strategies pursued by the Ethiopian government involved repeated military offensives into surplus-producing areas, the bombing of market places and relief operations, the planting of land mines, the destruction of crops and livestock, the poisoning of wells and the relocation or corralling of groups to prevent them from providing sustenance to opposing bodies. All of Eritrea and Tigray were affected by the war, as were most of the northern half of Wollo and Gonder by 1983 with the TPLF operating throughout most of their territories. The evidence suggests that the strategies pursued by the Derg were instrumental in setting the famine in train. The Relief Society of Tigray (REST) estimated that in Tigray, between 1975 and 1984, 20,000 tons of grains had been either burnt or confiscated by the Ethiopian army, 10,000 head of livestock had been killed or confiscated, 8,000 civilians killed and 100,000 displaced internally.³⁷ One analyst has argued that the ‘drought of 1984 was used as a scapegoat for a famine that had begun much earlier.’³⁸

³³ Claude E. Welch, *Protecting Human Rights in Africa: strategies and roles of non-governmental organizations*, (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1995), p. 120

³⁴ Baxter, ‘The creation & constitution of Oromo Nationality’, pp. 167-201

³⁵ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 34

³⁶ Kebede, *The State and Development in Ethiopia*, pp. 67-69

³⁷ Kirsty Wright & Max Peberdy, ‘Convoy to Tigray: report on the drought in Tigray’ (May 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

³⁸ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 138

The logic of the Derg's actions were clear. The TPLF operated as a classic guerrilla 'hidden' movement whose success depended entirely upon civilian support and accommodation.³⁹ Unlike the EPLF which fought to acquire and defend territory, the TPLF fighters moved among the population to attack Derg targets over a wide area, refusing to defend any territory.⁴⁰ Counter-measures were thereby centered increasingly on attacks on the civilian population, the aim being to 'drain the sea to catch the fish.'⁴¹ This helps to explain why famine conditions were more severe in Tigray than Eritrea.⁴² A monitoring mission to Tigray in July 1983, stated that the overall strategy of the governments seventh offensive in Tigray was both 'to disrupt relief efforts and capture western grain reserves' and 'to reduce the economic capacity of the civilian population so that they would be forced to go to government-held areas for survival.'⁴³ De Waal has argued that, 'the seventh offensive and the disruption it caused marked the onset of the mass famine' and that it was, 'the human debris from this assault [that] forced the international agencies to cry 'famine.'⁴⁴

If the aim of the government's counter-insurgency strategy was in a large part the creation of famine, an important element in this was the disruption of local coping strategies such as trade and migration. Market systems were continuously attacked by the state army. Grain surpluses that were produced in parts of western Tigray and northern Gonder every year from 1980 to 1984 were not moved to deficit regions in the central highlands. A Tigrayan farmer interviewed in a refugee camp in Sudan explained:

'It is because of the Derg that we are now in Sudan. Under normal conditions, even with the drought, we would have been able to trade and make a living. But now that markets are bombed, most are held at night and its hard for us to travel to them.'⁴⁵

³⁹ John English, Jon Bennett, Bruce Dick, 'Tigray 1984: an investigation' (January 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.441), p. 16

⁴⁰ The Front did establish semi-secure base areas in Shire, central Tigray and Agame, for training, treating their wounded, keeping prisoners of war, and as places of refuge. But essentially it remained committed to a guerilla style of warfare until the expulsion of the Derg from Tigray in 1989 when it had no choice but to operate as a conventional force militarily. John Young, 'Peasants and revolution in Ethiopia: Tigray 1975-89' (PhD thesis: Simon Fraser University, 1994)

⁴¹ REST.1, Abadi Zemo

⁴² Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 34

⁴³ Gayle E. Smith, 'Counting quintals: report on a field monitoring visit to Tigray, northern Ethiopia' (July 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

⁴⁴ Alex de Waal, 'Human rights', chapter 6, p. 26

⁴⁵ Cited in Clay & Holcombe, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine*, p. 65

As early as 1979, Kirsty Wright was reporting from western Tigray that:

'the increase in military activity in towns and the common practice by the Ethiopian army of gathering up peasants for militia service from the market place there has discouraged the peasants from traveling to urban areas to sell their crops.'⁴⁶

In this respect, one analyst has argued that:

'the sequence of the intensification of restrictions on the grain trade goes a long way to explaining the grain price rises in Tigray and northern Wollo during the period 1981-3, when food shortages per se were not significant.'⁴⁷

As trading networks collapsed, people were forced to pursue other strategies, notably migration. In Tigray, migrants headed westward toward the surplus-producing regions of Shire and Wolkeit. The fact that these regions became prime targets for the government's ground offensives, especially during 1983 and 1985, severely hampered their capacity to absorb the migrants. The response was an exodus of nearly 200,000 migrants across the border to refugee camps in eastern Sudan.⁴⁸

Relief was also a target in the government's warfare. Indigenous operations mounted by the relief wings of the EPLF and TPLF, the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) respectively, and supply lines from Sudan were constantly bombarded by the government. During the eighth offensive in Tigray in February 1985, refugees, REST aid convoys and feeding and transit centers were bombed while ground forces cut relief routes from Sudan so that the cross-border operation had to be suspended.⁴⁹ An independent observer witnessed the effect of bombings on ERA's relief operation:

'There were 2 bombings near the town of Germica in Barka province on June 21 and July 12-13 [1986]. Both of these attacks occurred during the time that ERA was distributing food assistance to people from the surrounding region and refugees returning from the Sudan. Since there are no EPLF military targets in the area, it seems clear that the Ethiopian airforce specifically targeted those civilians who were gathered near the town to receive food.'⁵⁰

A direct impact and goal of the actions of the Ethiopian army was the impoverishment of rural people in the northern provinces and a weakening of their food

⁴⁶ Kirsty Wright, 'Relief for Tigray: report on a visit, February - March 1979' (2 May 1979), (CAO.AF/ME.156)

⁴⁷ Alex de Waal, 'Human rights', chapter 6, p. 28

⁴⁸ Hendrie, 'Relief aid behind the lines', p. 129

⁴⁹ REST, telex to Paul Renshaw (31 March 1985), (CAO.AF/ME.439)

⁵⁰ Barbara Hendrie, 'Field report on Eritrea' (August 1986), (CAO.AF/ME.385)

security systems. In this respect the famine had a distinct political economy structured by relations of power; there were 'winners' and 'losers'. Famine was both the outcome of a process of impoverishment resulting from the transfer of assets from the weak to the politically strong, and itself a means by which the activities of the latter were facilitated in support of this process. Most importantly, people's strategies for coping did not simply break down but were broken down by systematic violence. As in the 1970s, famine had complex social and political dimensions.

1.1 *The state and famine relief 1983-85*

The response of the post-1974 military government to the 1983-85 famine was remarkably similar to that of the previous administration. The relief agenda - in terms of when and where relief distributions were acceptable and possible - was defined by the government. If there was a difference, it was in the extent to which the agenda and food were used by the Derg for proactive political ends. Haile Selassie's regime attempted to cover up the famine to save itself from international embarrassment, the Derg defined and controlled the relief agenda as an integral part of its military and political strategy.

In the context of internal war, food aid became an important strategic resource and convenient weapon of war. In late 1984 Ethiopia's Foreign Minister admitted that "food is an element in our strategy against the secessionists."⁵¹ An independent investigation carried out in 1984 and circulated among northern aid agencies, among them CA, stated that:

'reports from recent refugees in Sudan as well as those remaining in TPLF held areas of Tigray suggest that the government-run drought reception centers in the towns of Tigray and Wollo were doubling as recruitment centers. This in part explains why drought victims have preferred to move westward rather than into the towns for relief assistance.'⁵²

Other investigations observed:

'there is compelling evidence, that food aid under the control of the government was denied to those areas where the liberation Fronts operated. Food aid was available only to government forces, militia, and loyalist civilians in these areas,

⁵¹ David A. Korn, *Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union* (Croom Helm: London, 1986), p. 137

⁵² John English, Jon Bennett, Bruce Dick, 'Tigray 1984: an investigation' (January 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

or else was given out only as an inducement for resettlement of households, or to facilitate conscription of able-bodied men.'⁵³

Evidence of the direct and widespread diversion of food aid by the government also emerged - largely from the testimony of refugees in Sudan, ERA and REST officials, and visitors to EPLF and TPLF controlled areas who saw relief food stockpiled in the stores of captured garrisons.⁵⁴ A TPLF press release in 1985 asserted that:

'with the massive provision of food supplies throughout the area, in part by the air forces of the UK and West Germany, the same towns that serve as garrisons are now prepared logistically with food supplies for the army donated by the international community.'⁵⁵

In November 1983, a document sent by the former Commissioner of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, Shimelis Adugna, to officials in Wollega, instructing them to falsify records and fabricate bogus evidence prior to a visit by an auditor of United Nations World Food Programme was unearthed.⁵⁶

Food was not the only political weapon used by the government. The most politically motivated relief action came in the form of large-scale resettlement. Resettlement involved the movement - between November 1984 and March 1988 - of about 600,000 'environmental refugees', largely from the northern provinces of Tigray and Wollo to the south-western provinces of Gojjam, Wollega, Illubabor and Kefa. Resettlement itself was not necessarily a bad strategy. Indeed the rationale for resettlement on environmental grounds was initially supported by a 1985 joint Food and Agriculture Organisation/Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture study which argued in favour of a substantial resettlement programme of at least 150,000 people a year. Problems arose in the way the programme was planned and organized. By early 1985, clear evidence emerged that the resettlement was being carried out forcibly and against the will of both those relocated and those on whose lands they were being settled. People were being lured to government feeding centers in the north by offers of free

⁵³ Cutler, 'The development of the 1983-5 famine'

⁵⁴ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 190; & Roy Pateman, 'Drought, famine and development' in Lionel Cliffe & Basil Davidson (eds.), *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace* (Russell Press: Nottingham, 1988), pp. 171-174

⁵⁵ TPLF press release (3 March 1985), (CAO.AF/ME.317)

⁵⁶ Document enclosed in Solomon Inquai, letter to Paul Renshaw (28 November 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.219)

distribution of grain, rounded up by soldiers and taken south.⁵⁷ In the process families, neighbourhoods and communities were disbanded. Those who survived the appalling transport conditions, arrived to face ill-prepared and randomly selected sites.⁵⁸ Funding was woefully small and the government's inability to provide adequate food and services resulted in many deaths. Medecins Sans Frontieres estimated that 100,000 deaths could be directly attributed to the resettlement of civilians from Tigray and Wollo to the south-west.⁵⁹ In addition, there was evidence that the programme was diverting scarce transport and other resources that would otherwise have been available for food distribution in the north and was thereby reducing the effectiveness of relief elsewhere.

Resettlement led to increased displacement and migration both in the north and in the areas to be settled. In late 1984 and early 1985 people began to avoid the feeding centers in the north. CA received a telex from REST stating that:

'people are coming back from government camps due to the resettlement plan. As a result people in their tens of thousands are streaming into western Tigray from all corners. ...In 2 weeks time about 20,000 people have crossed into the Sudan. There are about 1,200 people coming daily. The death toll in our operational areas is estimated to be about 1,500 - 1,700 people daily.'⁶⁰

The interpretation of events among senior staff within the British Council of Churches was that:

'the move west which includes whole villages, has been accelerated in Tigray by fears caused by the Ethiopian government's decision to airlift famine victims to other parts of the country. People within 3 hours' walk of government-held towns are turning west instead.'⁶¹

In Wollega Province, where many of the settlers had been settled, widespread internal displacement of indigenous peoples and the flight of up to 20,000 from the area into Sudan's Blue Nile province occurred. The areas chosen for resettlement were exactly those where the OLF posed a security problem, western Wollega and Illubabor.

Although the resettlement programme was presented to the international community as a means of responding to the famine in the north, many Tigrayans, Oromos and

⁵⁷ Survival International, 'Ethiopia/resettlement: the evidence' (29 March 1985), (CAO.AF/ME.439)

⁵⁸ Gayle E. Smith, 'Report on new refugee arrivals to Blue Nile Province, Sudan' (13-14 January 1985), (CAO.AF/ME.318)

⁵⁹ Clay and Holcombe, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine*, p. 102

⁶⁰ Abadim, telex to Paul Renshaw (29 November 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.439)

⁶¹ Rev'd Brian Brown, letter to Marcus Colchester (19 December 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.311)

independent observers viewed it as a military operation aimed at depopulating the countryside in order to weaken popular support for the TPLF and OLF. The Oromo Relief Association in an open letter to northern aid agencies, including CA, stated:

‘This programme is not an exercise for famine relief, as the Ethiopians claim, but a political device to break up homogeneous populations in both areas [Tigray and Oromo areas of south].’⁶²

The existence of alternative resettlement schemes in the western highlands of Tigray and Wollo, where movement had been voluntary and cultural uprooting minimised, exposed the political motive of the government’s programme. An investigation by Cultural Survival, which had taken place in refugee camps in Sudan in early 1985, concluded that the programme was primarily being undertaken for counter-insurgency aims.⁶³ The aim was to depopulate the areas controlled by forces opposing the regime.

As CA noted, while

‘... a good case can be presented for the policy in a country with Ethiopia’s terrain, ... the manner in which it is being implemented, with virtually no budget for services, suggests that ideological factors are predominant and that the Derg sees it as an important way of consolidating control.’⁶⁴

Towards the end of 1984, at the same time as the world became morally outraged by the media images of starvation⁶⁵, at the same time as a ‘juggernaut of international aid’⁶⁶ was unleashed and at the same time as mortality rates due to famine peaked, the Ethiopian government launched a major offensive in Eritrea, followed by heavy military activity in Tigray and in Oromo areas where the OLF was active. The implications to those present were stark: ‘the government is attempting to hit with force the same people who are dying of starvation.’⁶⁷

⁶² ORA, ‘The destruction of the Oromo areas in the name of resettlement of famine victims’ (13 December 1985), (CAO.AF/ME.430)

⁶³ Clay & Holcombe, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine*

⁶⁴ Justin Phipps, ‘Report of a visit to Ethiopia’ (17 November - 5 December 1986), (CAO.AF/ME.411)

⁶⁵ With the screening in October 1984 of a film by Michael Buerk and Mohamed Amin, first on the BBC and then throughout the world, on the situation in Korem and Makelle, northern Ethiopia

⁶⁶ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 177

⁶⁷ TPLF press release (3 March 1985), (CAO.AF/ME.317)

Recent research on war and famine has argued against an understanding of conflict as a short-term or abnormal occurrence.⁶⁸ Internal conflict has been analysed as a long-term problem, organically linked to the instability of semi-subsistence production and having its own logic and political economy.⁶⁹ This logic moreover depended upon variously controlling, incapacitating, or destroying semi-subsistence economies. This was because the survival of people as political beings depended upon the survival of their livelihoods. To defeat people politically, their way of life had to first be destroyed or incapacitated. In this way, the 'various and complex patterns of semi-subsistence, together with their related coping strategies, are both the front-line targets and defensive strongholds of internal conflict in Africa.'⁷⁰ Food was not simply a weapon in internal conflict, it was a necessary goal of conflict. In Eritrea and Tigray the political economy of violence ensured that farming households were the principle targets of the Ethiopian offensive:

'people were being deliberately starved by the Derg, at the same time bombarded with the aim that if starvation affected them seriously, they would be weakened and the armed struggle would also be affected.'⁷¹

In this context, controlling the flow of relief became a key component of the war.

The Ethiopian famine had implications not just for the logistical design of an effective relief policy but more significantly, for the strategic implications of humanitarian intervention. The nature and effects of the international famine relief efforts in 1983-85 are the subject of the section below.

2. The International Politics of Relief

Unlike Haile Selassie in 1973, the Ethiopian government widely publicized the 1980s famine. Yet despite repeated calls from 1981 onwards from both government and rebel sources, western governments failed to respond vigorously until the famine was passed its peak. From 1980-84 the total amount of food aid requested by the Ethiopian

⁶⁸ Adams & Bradbury, *Conflict and Development*; Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*; Duffield, *War and Famine in Africa*

⁶⁹ Duffield, *War and Famine in Africa*, p. 3

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 17

⁷¹ REST.1, Abadi Zemo

Relief and Rehabilitation Commission was 2.46 million tons. Of this amount, it received just 440,000 tons, 18% of the amount requested.⁷² The reasons for under-reaction seem to have reflected important strategic goals and diplomatic priorities. To be understood, they need to be seen within the context of a cold-war system based upon nation-state sovereignty.

Ethiopia throughout the 20th century had been an important ally for western governments. From the 1950s, Haile Selassie cultivated particularly close ties with the United States and Ethiopia became the largest recipient of American aid in Africa.⁷³ Immediately following the 1974 revolution, the United States maintained its interest in Ethiopia, although a rather more concerned and cautious approach was evident. However, following the seizure of absolute power by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1977 - a close ally of the Soviet Union - America-Ethiopia relations deteriorated rapidly. A year later, the Soviet Union emerged as the Ethiopian's government's principal patron.⁷⁴ American development aid to Ethiopia was subsequently terminated, and humanitarian aid substantially cut.

Growing humanitarian need in the context of an impending famine in 1983 created a diplomatic problem for American policy. The situation was compounded by the uncertain applicability to Ethiopia of the Reagan Doctrine, which called for assisting rebel movements against Soviet-supported regimes such as Nicaragua. Fears surrounding the communist agendas of the EPLF and TPLF, as well as the hope of swaying the Ethiopian government to the West, insured that the EPLF and TPLF, and their respective humanitarian wings, received no American support. In the words of one US Embassy staffer in Khartoum: 'we see our interests served best by maintaining as cordial a relationship as possible with Addis Ababa. And who knows, maybe Ethiopia will turn into another Egypt', referring to the 1972 expulsion of Soviet influence from Egypt.⁷⁵ Until 1984, American response to the growing Ethiopian crisis was thereby

⁷² Borton, *The Changing Role of NGOs*, p. 25

⁷³ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 359

⁷⁴ It was this assistance that enabled the government to launch a series of large-scale offensives in Eritrea from 1978-84, with the huge 'Red Star' offensive of 1982 representing the most brutal.

⁷⁵ David Kline, 'Hunger, who's next: the politics of good deeds' *South*, December 1984

hedged with restraint. The cross-border operation from Sudan into Eritrea and Tigray was not seen as an alternative and subsequently the humanitarian aid that was being supplied went to the government side on which the fewest hungry Ethiopians could be found. For other western governments, the inadequacy of response was determined by a number of reasons. Ethiopia was seen by some as a cold war enemy that deserved to be shut off from any assistance. Many others had followed American policy in the late 1970s and had substantially cut or terminated their aid programmes to the country. In 1979, the British government terminated bilateral aid, although Ethiopia still remained eligible to receive disaster relief assistance.

In the meantime, there was a degree of skepticism about the figures produced by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, a problem compounded by the conflict and the Derg's restrictions on travel which prevented visits to the worst affected areas by representatives of western donor organisations and reduced the ability to corroborate the assessments by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission and the United Nations.⁷⁶ The fact that the revolution had resulted in a significant deterioration in the relationship with key western donors and the termination of several western programme of development assistance had also meant that the number of aid personnel in areas that were to be affected by the 1984-85 famine who could provide assessments of the situation had been drastically reduced.⁷⁷ Another factor that contributed to the inadequacy of relief was the evidence that aid was being misused. This issue of food aid being diverted for use by the Derg's armed forces arose on several occasions during 1982-84 and led to the temporary freezing of additional food aid whilst inquiries were pursued. For instance, a poorly researched article which appeared in the British *Sunday Times* in March 1983 alleged that western food aid was being sent to the Soviet Union in partial payment of a huge arms bill. Questions in the British and European Community parliaments followed making it more difficult to justify increased levels of food aid.

⁷⁶ Borton, *The Changing Role of NGOs*, p. 25; Cutler, 'The development of the 1983-5 famine', p. 372; & Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, pp. 364-366

⁷⁷ Borton, *The Changing Role of NGOs*, pp. 17-18

Not all western donor agencies shared the same reluctance. The major United Nations agencies (World Food Programme, United Nations High Commission for Refugees, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Children's Fund) and the European Community actually increased their assistance during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Yet the destination of this aid did little to ameliorate famine in that it was supportive of the Ethiopian government. Due to sovereignty considerations - article 2 (4) of the United Nations charter ruled out the threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence of the state - United Nations humanitarian assistance was not forthcoming in non-governmental areas.⁷⁸ It was not until 1990, and even then with some difficulty, that the United Nations was drawn into aid negotiations involving non-government areas. European Community aid was similarly supportive of the Ethiopian government, constrained by the Lome I agreement of February 1975 which committed it to a special developmental relationship with the Ethiopian government, an original signatory.⁷⁹

International strategic and diplomatic interests ensured that while there was a response to famine in Ethiopia, initially it was both selective and inadequate. Certainly, the situation was to change in October 1984 with the screening - initially on the BBC and then around the world - of the film by Michael Buerk and Mohammed Amin of the situation in Korem, northern Wollo. The response that followed, from official and private sources, was unprecedented in its scale and diversity. It has been estimated that between the October screening and the end of 1985, more money was channeled into the Ethiopian famine than to any other previous emergency humanitarian operation.⁸⁰ As Cutler emphasized in his study of relief to Ethiopia in 1983-85, increased media coverage meant that the risks for donors of not taking vigorous action came to outweigh the risks of action.⁸¹ Yet ultimately the strategic and diplomatic concerns of the major western donors remained. These provided the critical context for the actions that followed. These actions were unhelpful in three main ways: the donors allowed the

⁷⁸ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops & Tanks*, p. 38

⁷⁹ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops & Tanks*, pp. 38-39

⁸⁰ Clay, 'Western assistance and the Ethiopian famine'

⁸¹ Cutler, 'The development of the 1983-5 famine', pp. 401-404

Ethiopian government to define the relief problem; they failed adequately to monitor the delivery of relief or to insure it reached the intended beneficiaries; and they avoided addressing the under-lying conflict. The parallels with the international relief intervention in the 1971-75 famine are evident.

Donors' unwillingness to move beyond government definitions of the relief problem:

'Security is a problem in some areas ... [but] we can reach all the people.'
Relief and Rehabilitation Commission Commissioner, Dawit Wolde Giorgis,
1983.⁸²

'With the exception of the major towns along Tigray's only main road, almost the entire region is currently under the control of TPLF.' Jon Bennet,
independent observer, 1983.⁸³

In December 1984, diplomats and relief agency staff in Addis Ababa estimated that the government had access to just 22% of the famine-stricken population.⁸⁴ The great majority could only be reached by the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), which worked in territory administered by the EPLF and TPLF respectively and relied on cross-border routes from Sudan. Despite this situation, the majority of aid - over 90% - was channeled directly through the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. The result, as Charles Elliott, former director of CA, argued, was that 'the aid is not going to those who need it most. The Ethiopian government is receiving aid but in Eritrea and Tigray this doesn't get beyond the main towns.'⁸⁵

The problem of targeting humanitarian relief was a defining characteristic of the international relief operation in Ethiopia. In the mid-1980s the crucial question of access to populations in the war zones and the ways in which military realities on the ground were affecting the flow of relief food was left unchallenged by international donors, as was the Ethiopian government's refusal to acknowledge the existence of war in the north of the country. Particularly culpable in failing to challenge this misinformation

⁸² Notes on meeting with Ethiopian Ambassador and Relief Commissioner, Dawit Wolde Giorgis, (Oxfam House, 25 November 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.312). Dawit was formerly head of COPWE for Eritrea and a key strategist in the Red Star campaign in 1982. Solomon Inquai, letter to Paul Renshaw (28 November 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.219)

⁸³ Jon Bennett, 'Preliminary report on Tigray' (October 1982 - January 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

⁸⁴ Paul Valley, 'Famine: Russia and UK on collusion course' *The Times*, 4 June 1985

⁸⁵ CA, 'Information' (6 March 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.247)

was the United Nations. In August 1985, the United Nations Emergency Office for Ethiopia - set up in late 1984 to coordinate the international relief effort - released a report by Kurt Jansson on the relief operations in Eritrea and Tigray. The report, conducted under the constraints of the UN mandate which ensured that contact was not made with either REST or ERA, concluded that 75% of the affected people in Eritrea and Tigray were being reached from the government side.⁸⁶ The effect of this report on the drought-stricken was highlighted by REST:

‘this report has received widespread publicity in the international press. International opinion has been affected. This could have a potentially devastating affect upon the famine victims of Tigray - both by denying them the food aid they so desperately need and in terms of public opinion as people are led to believe that most victims are already being provided for. For example it might lead certain aid agencies and governments whose supply of food aid to Tigray via the Sudan is influenced by international public opinion to reduce their assistance to REST and therefore dramatically decrease the amount of food reaching the famine victims of Tigray.’⁸⁷

In the meantime, the existence of the cross-border operation from Sudan was never publicly acknowledged as an alternative or complementary route. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Kurt Jansson was reported as saying that ‘supplies reaching Eritrea and Tigray from the Sudan were insignificant making up less than 10% of the total.’⁸⁸ The result of this misinformation was that the majority of assistance continued to be channeled through the government’s Relief and Rehabilitation Commission while the majority of famine victims in the northern provinces of Ethiopia continued to suffer. In effect the Ethiopian government was allowed to shape the relief agenda.

The government’s hostility to relief for rebel-controlled areas of northern Ethiopia was clearly highlighted by its refusal throughout the 1980s to consider proposals forwarded by the United Nations, diplomats and the rebel fronts for the ‘safe passage’ of relief supplies into Tigray. Essentially such an arrangement would have entailed a *de facto* recognition of the war and of the Front’s control of large parts of the countryside. This would have been in direct contradiction of its own official statements that all famine victims in the north of the country were accessible for the purposes of

⁸⁶ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 368

⁸⁷ REST, ‘A response to Mr. Jansson’s report on the food distribution to famine victims in northern Ethiopia’ (September 1985), (CAO.AF/ME.439)

⁸⁸ ‘UN Says Food is reaching Northern Ethiopia’ *New York Times*, 4 August 1985

relief distributions through government channels alone. To justify their unwillingness to move beyond government definitions of when and where relief distributions were acceptable and possible, the major donors invoked the notion of state sovereignty and non-interference in a state's internal affairs. The resulting neglect of rebel-held areas did however come under some heavy criticism from individual agencies, notably CA. A senior CA staff member argued:

'free passage is now essential. There is no way that agencies like ourselves can hope to reach people in significant numbers from Sudan. Despite the public outcry there has been no positive response from the Ethiopian government to the requests for access and free passage for vital aid supplies. The international community is turning a blind eye to what is going on in order not to jeopardise other relief operations but the needs of vast numbers of people in these areas will not go away.'⁸⁹

A further manifestation of the donor's deference to the sensitivities of the Ethiopian government can be seen in the redirection of resources towards NGOs from the mid-1980s. In the context of the misuse of aid and government hostility to relief to the north, this allowed donors to avoid outright conflict with the Ethiopian government, while at the same time providing them with a way of minimizing their own accountability.⁹⁰ Lacking the political muscle to sway powerful obstructionist elements in the Ethiopian government and fearing for their operational survival, most relief agencies remained silent about abuses of aid. Such caution was vindicated when Medecins sans Frontieres was expelled in December 1985 for speaking out against the Derg's resettlement policy.⁹¹ Other agencies operating on the government side feared that if the western public's awareness of the role of conflict in causing the 1984-85 famine was increased then it might well reduce the level of interest and thus resources made available for their relief efforts.⁹²

It was estimated by CA that in 1985 under one-third of the European Community's aid to Ethiopia was going to the 3.25 million severely affected people in

⁸⁹ Paul Renshaw, 'Information' (2 November 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.311)

⁹⁰ Cutler, 'The development of the 1983-5 famine', pp. 400-401

⁹¹ Borton, *The Changing Role of NGOs*, pp. 30 & 64-65

⁹² Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops & Tanks*, pp. 87-88

Eritrea and Tigray, who could only be reached by ERA and REST respectively.⁹³ CA noted that:

'European Community officials have been sympathetic but have taken more account of the difficulties of providing aid than the needs of the population ... the EC finds it difficult to approve funds under Article 137 of the Lome convention but has the option of using Article 950 of its own budget. The desire to avoid diplomatic offense to an ACP [Africa, Caribbean and Pacific] partner seems to take precedence over humanitarian principles.'⁹⁴

It concluded that, 'the priority given by the European Community to legalistic and diplomatic factors is costing thousands of lives.'⁹⁵ The objections of the Ethiopian government coupled with fears of violating diplomatic protocol in relation to Ethiopian sovereignty meant that the major donors treated the war and questions of access with discretion. Yet as an independent observer argued with regard to Tigray:

'the majority of drought victims in Tigray are to be found in TPLF-held territory. The only way of reaching these people is through REST. This is not a matter of political choice, it is a matter of necessity.'⁹⁶

The failure of the donors to challenge the government's relief agenda considerably damaged the victims of famine.

Donors' lack of attention to implementation of relief programmes:

The many problems besetting the distribution of relief, once operations had been initiated, were closely related to the various benefits of famine. Essentially, the lack of adequate monitoring or supervision of relief supplies enabled the Derg to use food aid to further its own political aims. Donor's lack of concern with ensuring receipt of relief by famine victims was reflected in the unwillingness to publicly highlight government obstruction of relief reflected. The United Nations consistently concealed disturbing evidence produced by its own monitors about the diversion of food, forcible resettlement, and other abuses. Its role has been described thus:

'The United Nations Emergency Office for Ethiopia's main function was to act as a 'screening device', giving the appearance of competent action in response to famine but not compromising its actual position in Addis Ababa by unduly antagonizing the host government ... it would have been as embarrassing for the

⁹³ CA, 'The need for a balanced share of EC emergency aid for the areas of Ethiopia not controlled by the Government' (15 February 1985), (CAO.AF/ME.290)

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Jon Bennet, 'Preliminary report on Tigray' (October 1982 - January 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

donors who had entrusted resources to the Ethiopian government as it was for the government itself to have aid misallocation exposed.⁹⁷

Donor's tendency to divorce themselves from responsibility for finding out what happened to their relief was illustrated by the wishful assumption that people from TPLF and EPLF-held territories would be able to enter government-controlled towns to receive official relief distributions. As reported by Carol Berger of the BBC, this was not the case:

'drought victims who trekked to the government held feeding center at Korem from TPLF-held areas have been refused food rations and any other services until they bring identity cards from government sponsored farmers associations. They have been told to return to their villages to fetch such papers which, you may understand, is impossible as no government sponsored farmers association operates in TPLF held areas.'⁹⁸

Another manifestation of donor's lack of concern with relief responsibilities was highlighted by the Food for North initiative in early 1985. This initiative followed agreement between the American Vice President and the Ethiopian Foreign Minister to provide American relief to contested areas in Tigray and Eritrea from the government side. In Eritrea the programme was implemented by the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat on behalf of Catholic Relief Services. In Tigray, by World Vision in conjunction with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The initiative was criticised by those who, seeing Catholic Relief Services/Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat programmes commencing in towns taken by Derg forces only a few days before, saw it as supporting the Derg's pacification campaign. Paul Valley wrote:

'the relief agencies were pleased. So was the Derg, because the deal would provide a programme of pacification in the rebel areas newly under its control. Food could be distributed without the risk that it might fall into the hands of the rebel army. Moreover, the presence of western aid workers in the area would constrain the vigour of any TPLF counter-offensive. Having got the Soviet Union to finance the operation, Colonel Mengistu had now got the United States to finance its consolidation with food handouts.'⁹⁹

Another analyst added:

'when Ethiopian troops advance on a place like Barentu, and then a few days later an American voluntary agency comes in to distribute US food and medical

⁹⁷ Cutler, 'The development of the 1983-85 famine', p. 408

⁹⁸ Solomon Inquai, telex to Mary Galvin/Paul Renshaw (2 November 84), (CAO.AF/ME.439)

⁹⁹ Paul Vallely, 'Famine: Russia and US on collusion course' *The Times*, 4 June 1985

supplies, you become hard-pressed not to see this as an odd kind of coordination.'¹⁰⁰

In the absence of an international relief operation genuinely accountable to the victims of famine, relief 'policy' was not only inadequate but had important power functions. As one report claimed:

'in Tigray, the role of the relief agencies operating on the government side was distorted to protect military garrisons and their overland supply routes; in Eritrea, to pacify the countryside by supporting a programme of population relocation.'¹⁰¹

Donors' unwillingness to address the conflict underpinning the famine:

The third major limitation in donors' actions in relation to the famine was the neglect of the underlying causes of famine, notably the counter-insurgency strategies of the government and, more broadly, the civil war. Throughout the crisis, there was a significant lack of public criticism of the government's prosecution of the civil war, both in terms of causing the humanitarian crisis and in terms of deepening and manipulating it. The United States was the only donor government to undertake an investigation into the human rights aspects of the famine. That the 1985 investigation concluded that there was no deliberate policy of starvation being conducted by the government indicated the degree to which the strategy of the Ethiopian government by 1985 was misunderstood. As Duffield argued:

'American investigators failed to understand that the Ethiopian government had shifted to using the provision, rather than the denial, of food aid as part of its counter-insurgency strategy. Destroying the means of subsistence by civilians and then using internationally provided food aid to lure people into government held garrison towns was the new favoured war strategy.'¹⁰²

Importantly, the idea of linking aid with progress on peace was not taken up.

In the meantime donors tended to define the famine in terms of nutritional crisis and famine mortality. The focus was on biological cases and 'numbers in need'. Little attention was paid to the socio-economic and political processes by which people had become and were becoming needy, or how these processes might be slowed or

¹⁰⁰ J. B. Tucker, *The Politics of Famine: US foreign policy in Ethiopia, 1982-85* (Mimeo, 1985), p. 49 cited in Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 187

¹⁰¹ Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 195

¹⁰² Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 64

reversed. In effect the famine was de-contextualised. Writing about the relief operation to Tigrayan refugees in eastern Sudan in 1984-85, Hendrie has argued how institutional practices were dominated by an official discourse that focused on reducing death rates.¹⁰³ The broader socio-economic and political context was ignored as,

‘knowledge of the specific circumstances of the Tigrayan refugees was essentially irrelevant to the implementation of the dominant programme of the relief operation - namely, to get the death rates down.’¹⁰⁴

Such de-contextualisation was both inadequate and inappropriate. In the case of the Tigrayan refugees in Sudan, it led to a failure to anticipate the large-scale repatriation movement, and a failure to provide rehabilitation necessities to households returning to their land.¹⁰⁵ More importantly, it led to a general failure to address the underlying causes of migration rather than just the symptoms. For the most part, agencies working in government-held areas remained happy to either echo the government’s assertions that the famine was ‘natural’ or remain silent. Most agency personnel believed that an open debate on the causes of the famine would lead to donor apathy and reduced contributions. Indeed, as Clay has documented, many agency personnel were anything but passive in their attempts to limit the debate concerning the famine’s causes.¹⁰⁶ For agencies, like CA, involved in the cross-border operation from Sudan into Eritrea and Tigray, such misinformation was a particular problem, impacting on their ability to educate their northern constituencies about the crisis and on the efficacy of their public advocacy.

It would appear that official donors only wanted a particular knowledge of events, one that fitted in with their strategic and diplomatic priorities and helped underpin a narrow definition of what was to be done. Ultimately the failure to adopt a strong international advocacy position on the politics and conflict underpinning the famine meant that international humanitarian aid was exploited to support processes of violence.

¹⁰³ Hendrie, ‘Knowledge and power’, pp. 57-76

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 70

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 74

¹⁰⁶ Clay, ‘Western assistance and the Ethiopian famine’, pp. 153-157

3. Conclusion

Famine and famine assistance in Ethiopia in the 1980s were political. The failure of the international relief community to address this issue directly resulted in a number of avoidable mistakes and ultimately, 'the help hurt.'¹⁰⁷ Most of the damage to the victims of famine resulted from the unwillingness of western governments and agencies to understand the context in which the famine occurred and into which the assistance was delivered. Those involved in planning relief operations largely failed to come to grips with the local processes of force and exploitation that were creating famine and failed to anticipate opposition from those with a vested interest in blocking relief. Most importantly, the United Nations and most western governments did not speak out about the government's role in creating famine and blocking relief. Portrayed largely as a 'humanitarian' problem rather than a political problem, the United Nations, western governments and aid agencies were excused from direct involvement. The effect was a remarkable integration of humanitarianism and war: 'the provision of "humanitarian" assistance, with no questions asked, helps the Ethiopian government get away with murder.'¹⁰⁸

One issue that has emerged in particular, is that the official discourse on famine in the 1980s was similar to that in the 1970s. To begin with, the charitable urge that led to international response in 1973 and 1984 was motivated more by media pressure and the needs of appeasing northern constituencies than by a real desire to tackle the political crisis.¹⁰⁹ In this respect, it was characterised not by solidarity but by neutrality. The official discourse assumed a conventional, 'neutral' humanitarianism. A particular knowledge of the famine was created around which interventions were arranged. In the process the socio-economic and political dimensions of the famine were ignored and the possibility of alternative actions obscured. Whether in shaping the relief agenda, reaching the victims or treating the causes, donors' actions were informed by neutrality and an unwarranted respect accorded state sovereignty. In this context, donors' policy

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 148

¹⁰⁸ Clay & Holcombe, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine*

¹⁰⁹ In 1974, it was the effect of Jonathan Dimbleby's report on famine in Ethiopia, and in 1984, Michael Buerk and Mohamed Amin's report that forced international action

goals were seen to fail because they were 'thwarted' by structural, legal or political impediments. Further, the dominance of a particular discourse on famine had important local political and economic effects, fulfilling important functions for different groups of people. This could be seen as clearly in the Ogaden lowlands in the 1970s, as in Eritrea and Tigray in the 1980s. The issue in both cases was not why 'policy' had failed but to understand what 'policy' actually did. This tied in with Keen's political economy analysis of famine and relief, discussed in chapter 1, which argued that failure to push grain through to famine victims may not be about 'policy' failure but about relationships of power and hidden functions within policy.¹¹⁰ The implication, born out by experience in the Afar rangelands in the 1970s and the Eritrean and Tigrayan highlands in the 1980s, was that, in the context of local political processes, where physical and nutritional survival equaled political and military survival, claims of charitable 'neutrality' have been a dangerous dishonesty.

Where did CA position itself within the official discourse? Had the lessons of the organisation's own experiences in the 1970s famine been learned? The next chapter analyses CA's capabilities in the 1983-85 famine and in particular, its involvement in a very different discourse on famine and relief that developed on the rebel side of the conflict, in Eritrea and Tigray.

¹¹⁰ Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*, pp. 8-11

Table 4.1 Main Feature of Warnings of and Responses to the 1983-85 Ethiopian Famine

1981	
March	Ethiopia warns of serious crop failures in the north. UN Co-ordinating Committee for Relief and Rehabilitation investigates and recommends relief and development package
July/August	Rain failure reported in Wollo, Tigray and Eritrea
1982	
early 1982	The Organisation of African Unity warns that more than 100 million Africans would be affected by severe food shortages continuing into 1983
April	The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission details assistance requirements for more than 5.5 million people and states that 'drought and the effects of war ... have together made the food supply most critical'
July	The National Meteorological Services Agency warns of drought following a one-month delay in the onset of <u>kremt</u> rains in the north
November	REST reports drought and warfare displacing populations in Tigray and Eritrea. High food prices (3x normal) reported in centre of famine zone
December	The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission publishes a second 'assistance requirement' report asking for aid for 4.8 million people. Save the Children Fund begins warning donor agencies of the likelihood of famine, including an influx to Sudan, and sets up a supplementary feeding centre at Korem in northern Wollo
1983	
January	First alert from the FAO Global Information and Early Warning System on the African Food Situation for 1983-84
February	Oxfam begins feeding operations at Ibbat
March	The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission requests relief for 3.9 million people
April	New Relief and Rehabilitation Commission aid request for 3.3 million drought affected people in the four northern regions. Save the Children Fund team kidnapped by TPLF guerrillas at Korem
July/August	Rain failure repeated and spreading. Early Warning System report further crop failures expected
October	FAO convenes a special meeting of representatives of donor countries and drought-affected countries to discuss the food crisis. Catholic Relief Services requests a further 16,000 Mt. Food from the United States Agency for International Development
November	The International Wheat Council warns of the deteriorating situation in the Sahelian countries, including Ethiopia, during its 99th session. Survey into Tigray by Oxfam team. Very poor nutrition status of children in famine zone. Massive outmigration of farmers into Sudan in search of work. Sorghum harvest poor in northern Sudan, so many return empty handed. Unseasonal grain price hikes in Wollo, spreading southwards. Grain prices rising in food surplus areas of western Tigray. Increase in volume of livestock sales in Wollo.

December	The UN Economic Commission for Africa states that 150 million Africans will 'face hunger and malnutrition in 1984'
1984	
January	The USA announces \$90 million Additional aid for Africa. The International Disaster Institute / London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine begin warning agencies of worsening famine conditions and publishes evidence
February	FAO convenes joint session with UN ambassadors to inform them of crop conditions, food supplies and relief effort in famine-affected African nations. FAO/World Food Programme mission sent to Ethiopia to assess needs
March	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission launches extraordinary appeal for food for more than 6 million people, accompanied by a film to help convince donors of the seriousness of the situation. The World Bank issues a strong warning that Africa is facing a 'food catastrophe' and that Ethiopia, Chad, Mozambique and Burkina Faso have only four month's food left in stock
May	The US government approves only 8,000 MT of emergency food for Catholic Relief Services
June	The London Economic Summit states that Western leaders are 'greatly concerned' about African drought and are 'pledged to maintain and wherever possible increase' aid to Africa. Church Drought Action in Africa issues a famine warning for Ethiopia. Oxfam warns of famine in Tigray. The FAO/World Food Programme needs assessment report is published, recommending only 125,000 MT of emergency food aid for Ethiopia. FAO delays clearance of World Food Programme shipment of 30,000 MT.
July	'Harvest Hunger' shown on British Independent Television. Disaster Emergency Committee appeal launched. Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator circulates 5 telexes on the deteriorating situation in Ethiopia between May and July
August	The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission publishes an update on relief needs and the general situation, stating that 'we have no grain in our stocks as of the middle of July'. World Food Programme calculates the Ethiopian food deficit at only 50,000 Mt. Mass migration to roadside begins
September	Christian Relief and Development Association demands 'immediate and extraordinary action' of western donors. Oxfam announces a 10,000 MT grain shipment to shame Western governments into action. World Food Programme figures state that Ethiopian food aid received or in the pipeline exceeds requirements. The Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator states that crop growing conditions in the northern famine areas are 'almost satisfactory'. Revolutionary celebrations draw Ethiopian attention away from famine
October	Deaths in Korem camp reach 100 a day. The situation there is filmed by Mohamed Amin and presented by Michael Buerk as a 'famine of biblical proportions'. Film extracts get prime-time coverage worldwide over the coming weeks, stimulating an international political furor. According to the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission more than six million people threatened.

Sources: (CAO.AF/ME 587.3); & P. V. Cutler, 'The development of the 1983-5 famine in northern Ethiopia' (PhD thesis: London University, 1988), pp. 365-367

Chapter 5

THE ETHIOPIAN FAMINE 1983-85: A POLITICAL ECONOMY FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

It has been argued above that the 1983-85 Ethiopian famine was a spectacular example of manipulated humanitarianism and that conventional official discourses on relief were inadequate. This chapter looks at the alternative framework for action presented by CA, through the Emergency Relief Desk (ERD) and its cross-border operation into Eritrea and Tigray. It argues that this illegal operation not only responded to the needs of the famine victims in Eritrea and Tigray - areas largely ignored by the international community due to an overriding respect accorded state sovereignty - but more importantly, impacted on processes of political survival in a radically different manner. In government-held areas, famine was politicised on the terms laid down by a predatory dictatorship and relief manipulated to support processes of asset stripping. In rebel areas, an alternative form of the politicisation of famine occurred in which a strategic commitment to fight famine was made as part of a progressive social contract and relief was used to strengthen processes of accountability. ERD thus, 'provided a critical, if not subversive, reflection on conventional practice.'¹

Yet the story of the consortium was neither harmonious nor simple and the humanitarianism that it represented was not free from internal contradiction and tension. As a clandestine and innovative relief operation, ERD had the handicaps of its pioneering role: its members could not publicise its fundamental nature and remained trapped within a contradiction between the reality of its involvement and the claims, given the perquisites of international law, of its neutrality. Moreover, contradictions in the balance between neutrality and involvement reflected important differences amongst ERD's member agencies. My concern in this chapter is not to describe the history of the consortium but to examine the fundamental nature of the alternative structure it provided and the implication for the positioning of relief and development mandates. In this respect, my concern is to analyse the tensions within the consortium as a way of

¹ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 172

reflecting on the new framework for the theorisation of famine and organisation of relief that it provided.

CA was a key player in the history of the ERD. This study examines the role of CA in the consortium and its positioning with regard to the shaping of new practice and new theory. It explores how CA defined its role in the 1980s and what its capabilities were. The analysis begins with a brief history and profile of the consortium and CA's involvement. It then moves on to an analysis of the operation's organisational adaptation to the conflict situation in Ethiopia and the practical and theoretical implications of its internal debates. As the starting point for this study is a recognition that the cross-border operation provided a radically different model of humanitarianism, the analysis then moves on to evaluate this model. Finally, the implications for CA are discussed.

1 . The Emergency Relief Desk 1981-85

The ERD was formed in 1981 as an ecumenical NGO consortium to facilitate cross-border humanitarian assistance from Sudan into non-government areas of Eritrea and Tigray.² It arose from the effects of internal war in Ethiopia and the indifference of the international community to conditions in non-government areas due to an overriding respect accorded Ethiopian sovereignty: 'because of the Organisation of African Unity and United Nations Charters ... it is only NGOs that can step in to provide assistance and support the populations outside government control.'³ There were 9 core members:

Bread for the World, Germany
 Christian Aid, UK
 Danchurch Aid, Denmark
 Dutch Interchurch Aid, The Netherlands
 International Coordination Committee for Development Projects, The Netherlands
 Lutheran World Relief, USA
 Norwegian Church Aid, Norway
 Sudan Council of Churches, Sudan
 Swedish Church Relief, Sweden

² For a history of the ERD, see Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*

³ Gayle E Smith, 'Briefing document on Eritrea and Tigray' (February 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.199)

The role of ERD in channeling emergency aid to victims of war and drought in Eritrea and Tigray was both crucial and controversial. In 1983, grain supplies delivered through Ethiopian government channels were 9 times greater than those reaching Eritrea and Tigray. This was despite the fact that up to one in three affected Ethiopians were depending on the Eritrean Relief Association and the Relief Society of Tigray, operational in Eritrea and Tigray respectively, for food.⁴ Before its closure, in June 1993, ERD had mobilised about 3/4 million metric tons of food aid for Eritrea and Tigray. Duffield and Prendergast calculated that the ERD consortium alone provided US \$350 million worth of cash and goods, about one third of which was raised by ERD members themselves.⁵

The origins of the consortium can be traced back to the 1970s when intermittent and confidential attempts were made through the ecumenical network, focusing on the Sudan Council of Churches, to bring humanitarian assistance into rural Eritrea.⁶ By the autumn of 1976, the Sudan Council of Churches had established an Eritrean Relief Desk in Khartoum, largely supported by Swedish Church Relief, for the reception of material aid and the purchase of Sudanese sorghum for transport to the border. A year later, Norwegian Church Aid opened an office in Khartoum to serve its programme in Eritrea. Discussion subsequently took place between the Sudan Council of Churches and Norwegian Church Aid with a view to establishing a joint desk to foster ecumenical assistance to Eritrea and Tigray and on 21st February 1981 the ERD was officially established.

The actual transport and distribution of humanitarian assistance channeled through the consortium was undertaken by three operational partners in their own target areas - the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and the Oromo Relief Association (ORA). ERA and REST managed all relief distributions in the areas under the control of the Ethiopian People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the

⁴ CA, 'Statement based on memorandum to the UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee on the difficulties associated with providing aid to areas not under Ethiopian government control' (18 December 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.247)

⁵ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 6

⁶ ERD.3, Jacques Willemsse

Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) respectively. ERA had been set up in 1975 and REST three years later, as quasi-autonomous relief administrations. ORA, formed in 1979 to provide relief and rehabilitation support to Oromos displaced in their own country or taking refuge in neighbouring states, was not such a big player in the operation. In terms of aid received, compared to ERA and REST, ORA took less than 10% of the total.⁷ The difficulty of assessing the Oromo Liberation Front's claims to have liberated areas within which ORA could work accounted for this. ERD therefore confined its support to ORA's programmes in the Blue Nile Province of Sudan where it undertook to supply a few thousand Oromo refugees in the Yabus region with assistance. The cross-border operation also depended on and would not have been possible without the cooperation of the successive Sudanese governments and their permission to keep the border open. As one observer put it, 'there was a lot of political risk in it for them - sovereignty was a holy cow.'⁸ Essentially, Sudanese cooperation was won for two reasons: the tacit support given to the liberation fronts was a response to the much more substantial support the Derg gave the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army in Southern Sudan; and the operation promised to contain a situation characterised by massive outpourings of Eritrean and Tigrayan refugees into Sudan. In this respect, the operation was often called a refugee preventing operation.⁹

The ERD was characterised by a limited humanitarian brief and 'informal' organisational structure. This was because it had been primarily conceived as a response to symptoms, the influx of refugees into Sudan, and not to causes, food insecurity in Front-held territories, and because it operated as an illegal and clandestine cross-border operation. In an unwelcome international environment, it was seen as a temporary instrument; cash payments were excluded and only aid in kind provided; transport, in the form of trucks which were in short supply in Eritrea and Tigray, were not provided and transportation costs only met either to Port Sudan or the border and not to the point of distribution; no formal mechanism for the consultation or

⁷ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 54

⁸ ERD.3, Jacques Willemse

⁹ *ibid.*

involvement of the 'implementing agencies' (ERD's terminology for its indigenous relief partners) were established; no provision for long-term development was made; and ERD's projected profile was as a non-political humanitarian consortium. Essentially, the consortium was 'an ecumenical conduit for channeling relief assistance in kind to the implementing agencies, verifying its legitimate distribution and disseminating information to its members.'¹⁰

However, the limits of this informal relief structure were already being felt by mid-1983 as the worsening situation in Eritrea and Tigray created pressure for change. This in turn exposed differences between member agencies over such issues as member representation; broadening the mandate to include rehabilitation, transport and development assistance; and ERD's policy with regard to publicity and advocacy. Despite all being ecumenical agencies, it must be remembered that the consortium members had marked differences in philosophy and approach, as well as in personalities. It was the injustices of the war and the needs of its victims that essentially held it together.¹¹ In February 1984, in response to these conflicts over an essentially neutral approach, an evaluation of the programme was carried out. Eighteen months later, in October 1985, a new ERD agreement was finally ratified. By this agreement, ERD re-established itself as a formal consortium of agencies, with Norwegian Church Aid playing a leading role. The restricted humanitarian mandate was reaffirmed but broadened to include rehabilitation: provision of seeds and tools; transport operating costs; internal grain purchase in Tigray; provision of medical items and water resources; and cash assistance. Member agencies were formally involved in the structure, by inclusion on ERD's Board, and the implementing agencies were given the right to approach the executive committee for consultation and were invited to request administrative assistance from the ERD office although ERD could still not speak out on their behalf.

To some member agencies, ERD still remained trapped in a profound contradiction - between the narrative of 'neutrality' and the operation's real nature. The

¹⁰ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 49

¹¹ ERD.3, Jacques Willemse

fault lines of this contradiction had moreover become increasingly apparent as the political and media climate rapidly changed between the time of the evaluation in early 1984 and the formalisation of the agreement towards the end of 1985. This was characterised by the increasing involvement of strategic donors - with the United States and subsequently the European Community giving assistance to the operation; the precedent established by some member agencies of more active individual campaigning; and the increased media recognition of the need for cross border activities. The differences between the agencies were becoming more apparent, the fault lines more entrenched. While the reaffirmation of a limited relief and rehabilitation mandate by the new agreement represented on one level a necessary compromise for holding the consortium members together, on another level, it reflected a more general failure to satisfactorily resolve the issue of engagement with the political reality of the complex emergency.

CA was at the forefront of calls for a broader and more effective relief and development agenda and advocated an 'involvement' that essentially went beyond ERD's mandate and 'neutral', discrete profile. CA had been channeling relief into Eritrea, through Norwegian Church Aid, from as early as 1979. Between that time and the height of the famine, its involvement grew substantially and far exceeded its assistance to relief efforts on the government side, channeled largely through the Christian Relief and Development Association and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Table 5.1 Christian Aid Grants to Ethiopia (£) 1979-1984

	Ethiopia (via Addis)	Eritrea (via Khartoum)	Tigray (via Khartoum)
1979-80	65,0000		3,300
1980-81	28,985	32,000	
1981-82	51,548	116,500	20,000
1982-83	2,200	75,450	75,855
1983-84	147,425	712,000	381,250

Source: Paul Renshaw, 'CA, Eritrea and Tigray - what next?' (14 June 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.411)

By 1984, CA was in the words of one senior staff member, a 'big agency' in terms of funding in Eritrea and Tigray through the ERD.¹² Importantly, senior CA staff had developed a closer identification with the people and their problems. This resulted from various factors: the experience derived from a number of staff visits to Eritrea and Tigray which reinforced awareness of the scale of need and impressed on all the visitors the capacity of the relief administrations; an increase in the amount of documentary information coming out of the northern provinces which provided a firmer base upon which to assess possible responses; the growth of experience in relating to ERA and REST; and a growth in confidence about the effectiveness of ERD to act as a monitoring channel.¹³ With this closer 'solidarity' went a growing feeling and much debate within CA about the need to say more in public about the Eritrean and Tigrayan struggles; about the gross imbalance of humanitarian resources flowing into the northern provinces by comparison with other parts of Ethiopia through Addis Ababa; and about the need to support the respective relief administrations in broader developmental programmes aimed at reducing vulnerability and not simply alleviating distress through the input of food aid. How issues of 'neutrality' and 'involvement' were played out and how CA resolved its position is taken up in the following section.

2. Organisational Adaptation in Conflict Situations: the Emergency Relief Desk in Ethiopia 1981-91

The tension between neutrality and involvement in western humanitarian interventions exposes the truth that the components of aid agencies' relief mandates may conflict - a human rights agenda based on principles of solidarity may conflict with charitable imperatives based on principles of neutrality. Duffield has written that, 'apart from its ecumenical basis, the defining characteristics of the ERD mandate was (a) its restriction to relief items in kind and (b) its discrete and non-political style of work.'¹⁴ To have engaged in wider development activities or to have accepted a public advocacy

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 49

role for the Fronts would have implied political solidarity and seriously jeopardised its legitimacy as a humanitarian agency at a time when sovereignty was paramount. Thus, despite being created to deal with the political challenges of a political disaster - refugees and victims of starvation - ERD's projected self-image as a neutral humanitarian consortium implied a degree of political distance from the operation itself.

The international respect accorded to sovereignty and consequent principle of non-interference began to change from the mid-1980s. As political restrictions on aid agencies, like CA, fell away, their expanded operational involvement was supported by increased donor funding. By 1985, American and subsequently European Community assistance, although still cautious, swung behind the cross-border operation. The previously illicit operation began to gain *de facto* recognition at the expense of nation-state sovereignty. As an increased operational involvement allowed for greater association with the complex reality in Eritrea and Tigray, the limitations of neutrality as a policy became manifest. Yet the contradiction between 'neutrality' and 'involvement' continued to shape the internal discourse and outward policy direction of ERD, reflecting the differences amongst its members. The key contradictions in this shifting debate may be analysed with respect to three main operational issues: partnership; information; and development.

The meaning of partnership:

At the core of ERD's operation lay its relationship with its main implementing agencies: ERA, operating in areas controlled by the EPLF; and REST, operating in areas controlled by the TPLF. At the core of this relationship lay a profound contradiction. This reflected a basic misunderstanding, on the part of the consortium, of the nature of the liberation fronts and the role of the relief organisations they had established. It was a contradiction to which CA proved especially sensitive.

Duffield has written that, 'the Fronts ... established a political economy of liberation capable of simultaneously providing effective famine relief, engendering political support and pressing the war.'¹⁵ Moreover, at the heart of this political

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 18

economy lay a 'process of internal development and social change having few parallels in contemporary Africa.'¹⁶ To understand why public welfare was placed at the heart of the Fronts' political agenda and how war facilitated development, one must turn to the politics of the liberation Fronts and the nature of their armed struggles. Essentially, these centered around the idea of 'a social contract between the guerrillas and the peasants.'¹⁷ Recent research on peasant mobilisation in Tigray has warned that:

'although apparently driven to destitution by the crisis in the rural economy, most Tigrayan peasants did not rush to the revolutionary banner, but instead stood back and evaluated the ideals and programs of the movements contesting for their support, considered the personal credibility of the revolutionaries, and judged their prospects of defeating the Derg, before pledging themselves.'¹⁸

Mass resentment was channeled into revolutionary struggle by the organization and mobilization of the peasants and by a social exchange between the revolutionaries and the peasants.¹⁹ Components of this social exchange included the provision of facilities such as schools and clinics and a program^{me} of reforms designed to transform rural society. Of particular importance was land reform and the extension of a system of local government known as baitos and based on elective village committees. The link between the provision of welfare and the mobilisation of the peasantry was indicated by one TPLF cadre:

'often a peasant meeting would not end until there was a resolution and an agreement to carry out some reform. In many parts of Tigray this commitment was to land reform and only after baitos were set up and land reform carried out were peasants prepared to defend their institutions and join the TPLF fighters.'²⁰

This commitment to public assistance was complemented by the Front's pursuit of self-reliance. To this end civilian administrative structures in Front-held territories were organised in such a way that civilian productive capacity and political support could be voluntarily accessed. Structures involved the creation of elective village committees interconnecting with civilian departments responsible for the main aspect of public policy - health, education, transport, economy, social welfare. These vertical

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 17

¹⁷ REST.5, Yemane Kidane

¹⁸ John Young, 'Peasants and revolution in Ethiopia: Tigray 1975-89' (PhD thesis: Simon Fraser University, 1994), pp. 386-387

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 386

²⁰ Gebru Asrat cited in *ibid.*, p. 386

structures were complemented by horizontal mass political organisations based on socio-economic groups - women, peasants, workers and professionals. The structure allowed for development and relief assistance, land reform and political education to be channeled in one direction, while voluntary material and political support could be accessed in the other. It was the ability of the Fronts to defend the civilian populations and meet their economic and welfare needs that won them their political support. From as early as the mid-1970s, the possibility of supplying foreign relief assistance was seen as an important part of this relation of reciprocity. To access such relief and to improve the disaster management capacity of the Fronts' civilian departments, relief associations - ERA and REST - were established. In this respect, ERA and REST should be seen as an 'organic part' of the social contract between the Fronts and the peasants. Indeed, initially it was the Fronts that bore the responsibility for supporting the relief associations, in terms of manpower, transport and financial support. As Ibrahim Seit, former Head of logistics for ERA remarked, 'without the EPLF, ERA could not have done anything.'²¹

Constitutionally, ERA and REST's administration and personnel were separate from that of the EPLF and TPLF respectively. At the local level, cooperation and coordination between the relief and civilian administrations meant that to the people of Eritrea and Tigray, as to independent observers, they were virtually indistinguishable. In practice, both relief associations worked through the civilian administrative structures set up by the Fronts. As Gayle Smith observed:

'Peoples councils, called baitos in Tigrinya, are the backbone of village life in the TPLF-administrated areas of Tigray, and integrated across the territory, they provide the human infrastructure through which both REST and TPLF coordinate their activities.'²²

The success of ERA and REST hinged not only on their operational capability which will be looked at in more detail below, but most importantly, on this political relationship between the Fronts and the people. Unlike the predatory relationship between the ruler and ruled in government-controlled areas, the political accountability

²¹ ERA.2, Ibrahim Seit

²² Gayle E. Smith, 'Counting quintals: report on a field monitoring visit to Tigray, northern Ethiopia' (July 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

of the Fronts to their civilian population ensured that relief was not manipulated. In Front-held areas, political mobilisation was characterised by a social contract in which the struggle against famine and enviro-economic vulnerability became a political issue. Paul Renshaw of CA noted that, 'neither ERA nor REST can operate in a political vacuum.'²³

In the meantime and in contrast to this reality, ERD's projected self-image as 'neutral' necessitated ERA and REST similarly be cast as neutral 'implementing agencies' devoid of political reality. Accepting a public solidarity role with ERA and REST, would have jeopardised ERD's neutrality and its role as a discrete buffer in attracting much needed international aid. This contradiction had profound implications on the reality of the 'partnership' pursued by ERD with the indigenous relief organisations. CA noted, with regard to ERA, that:

'the effects of continued indirect relationships through ERD, with its limited mandate ... are such that, effectively, ERA is denied the ability to administer the funds for a large proportion of the programmes which it is acknowledged effectively to implement in Eritrea. The existence of ERD and, still more, its growth, means restricted opportunities for self-development by ERA and its staff.'²⁴

It was a situation much resented by the relief associations. As the former Chairman of ERA remarked:

'ERA was doing everything, managing everything and yet ERD played it as though it was its show and would never discuss policy with us. It was a joke among us that they would shut the door on us.'²⁵

The niceties of international sensitivities was undermining the principles of empowerment and equal partnership, to which most aid agencies were committed, at least in rhetoric, by the 1980s. ERD was denying its implementing agencies, on whose capacity it depended, the ability to develop. This tension was ultimately resolved by individual members pursuing 'partnership' bilaterally, while ERD maintained its neutral platform and essentially acted as a 'donor'.²⁶ CA resolved to 'move to a position

²³ Paul Renshaw, 'Notes on ERD evaluation report' (16 April 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.290)

²⁴ Paul Renshaw, 'Eritrea: some reflections on a recent visit' (11 January 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.412)

²⁵ ERA.1, Paulos Tesfagiorgis

²⁶ *ibid.*

where CA conducts its essential business with ERA and ... contribute[s] towards enabling ERA to grow itself as a "non-profit humanitarian organisation."²⁷

ERD's failure to resolve the contradiction between its claim to 'neutrality' and its reliance upon indigenous relief agencies had significant implications for policy prescription. The work of ERA and REST would not have been possible without the material, institutional and political support of the Fronts. Yet to a significant extent, ERA and REST were portrayed as 'neutral' by ERD, their efficiency and humanitarian credentials emphasised, their political profile played down.²⁸ ERD's guidelines on the evaluation of indigenous agencies seeking to become recipients was essentially de-politicised, putting emphasis on monitoring, logistical and administrative capacity. As Duffield and Prendergast have argued:

'it is interesting to note that these criteria do not include any reference to the participatory or community targeting systems that the EPLF and TPLF had developed or the relations of accountability and reciprocity linking rural producers to the political authorities.'²⁹

The Fronts in Eritrea and Tigray presented Western donors with a unique political economy in which public welfare constituted an integral part of the armed struggle. ERA and REST were a core feature of this political economy. In this respect, notions of 'neutrality' belied the reality and provided a flawed analysis of policy. In addition, the dictates of a neutral approach exposed the rhetoric of partnership. As a former ERA official argued:

'partnership, in the real sense, is about decision-making, ownership of projects and being able to prioritise the programme to suit your own environment. We were not even part of ERD. ERD wanted to decide for us, it was only for consultation that we were sometimes called. Later on, it was decided that we should be part of the meetings [1985 October Agreement], but still in terms of operational issues there were times that things were dictated to us.'³⁰

Information in a disaster zone:

'Yesterday the news came over the World Service of the BBC that Ethiopia is in desperate need of food assistance. ... the news is received with knowing glances by my co-workers here. No one here has any doubt that the civilian food needs in the government-held areas are vast, but the fact that they on the

²⁷ Paul Renshaw, memo to Martin/Kate (30 January 1984), (CAO.AF/ME 290)

²⁸ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 11

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 55

³⁰ ERA.3, Roso

other side of the lines are nowhere mentioned in the report does not sit well with REST officials attempting to mount a massive relief effort, or with the civilians that know that food donated through the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator will never reach them. The BBC quotes a figure of over four million people seriously affected by drought, and a detached news announcer stated that Eritrea, Tigray, Wollo and Gonder are the areas hardest hit. It was not stated, however, that the gains of the TPLF and EPLF have meant that the government can barely move off the main highways in Tigray or Eritrea, or that the war zone is spreading to include eastern Gonder and northern Wollo. For all anyone who heard the report knows, there is a drought and there is a government body to implement the needed relief effort. ... From the angle of relief, the broadcast means that REST is still in a position of having to prove itself capable of delivering to civilians in Tigray, and must continue to counter the publicity which reinforces the notion that all of Tigray is being reached by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. In fact, REST is still at the stage of having to prove it exists -- it is a tricky arena to enter for an organisation that must repeatedly demonstrate its humanitarian objectives in the midst of a disaster shrouded in and directly related to political controversy. For me it is a different irony, and I have the sinking feeling that no one in the outside world knows we are here save an insufficient number of comparatively courageous NGOs.³¹

Information is not neutral and never less so than in situations of war. How was information used in the context of Ethiopia in the mid-1980s? The official line of the consortium was that the cause of getting aid into Eritrea and Tigray would be best served by keeping as low a profile as possible. In terms of gaining official aid, this was a necessary precaution. Bilateral donors had powerful reasons fueling their reluctance to provide assistance to ERA and REST: such assistance would undermine the sovereignty of the internationally recognised government of Ethiopia and was hence illegal; and the close ties between the relief agencies and the Fronts posed the dilemma that assistance could be easily diverted for military use. As arguments about the severity of the humanitarian need in the Front-held territories and the need to 'balance' humanitarian assistance provided on the Derg side began to prevail, the conditions under which donor assistance would be made available became apparent - aid was to be restricted to 'relief' and to be treated as confidential. To this end, donor aid allocations were often hidden in programmes to refugees in Sudan or other allocations to Ethiopia. ERD provided otherwise reluctant donor governments with an acceptable conduit so long as it maintained its 'discrete' self-image and limited humanitarian brief. Paul Renshaw of

³¹ Gayle E. Smith, 'Counting quintals: report on a field monitoring visit to Tigray, northern Ethiopia' (July 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.441), p. 58

CA dismayed, 'the problem with ERD is that to maximise its resource, it can only go at the pace of the most cautious.'³²

The operational demands of maintaining a 'low profile' conflicted with the fund-raising and development education demands of the member agencies, as they developed a deeper understanding of what was happening in Eritrea and Tigray and felt the need to go on public record about the consequences of the war. Paul Renshaw complained:

'we do not seek massive publicity for our support of ERA/REST but at the same time want to see the grave needs in Eritrea/Tigray more widely recognised. It is undoubtedly an uncomfortable position!'³³

By early 1984 CA resolved to take a higher media profile on Ethiopia.³⁴ In February, it launched an Appeal for Eritrea and Tigray:

'to raise the level of awareness of our constituency and the general public about the plight of the people, the political reasons which prevent a solution to their problems and the unwillingness of the international community to help them on anything more than a token scale.'³⁵

Dr Solomon Inquai, former Chairperson of REST, noted the effect of such an appeal:

'I think that was a very big breakthrough for us because they put REST on the front. More than what they gave us in kind, the fact that such a reputed well-known organisation was willing to deal with us, gave us credit so that others would come in. What I appreciated at the time and all my colleagues in REST, more than the aid was this fact of recognition.'³⁶

Respectful of ERD's desire not to have its name mentioned in public and media forums, CA became increasingly accustomed to using the names of the implementing agencies in its press releases, articles and interviews. From using ERD as a 'cover for discreet and limited assistance in a contentious but needy area', CA began increasingly to give 'the appearance of relating directly to agencies associated with "liberation movements."³⁷ Fears of alienating its constituency by association with 'liberation movements', founded on the agency's past experiences in the 1970s discussed in chapter 1, were belied by results: 'CA's own appeal for Eritrea and Tigray [in 1984] was couched in terms which made it clear that assistance was sought for programmes being operated by indigenous

³² Paul Renshaw, 'Notes on ERD evaluation report' (16 April 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.290)

³³ Paul Renshaw, letter to Jan Van Doggenaar (17 February 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.219)

³⁴ Paul Renshaw, 'Ethiopia, CA and the media: considerations for the formulation of a policy' (11 January 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.412)

³⁵ CA, 'Appeal for Eritrea and Tigray' (February 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.199)

³⁶ REST.3, Dr Solomon Inquai

³⁷ Paul Renshaw, 'CA, Eritrea and Tigray - what next?' (14 June 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.411)

agencies in "liberated areas."³⁸ Money flowed in surprising quantities. CA concluded that 'in the political context of the Horn the general public was not concerned about CA working in an unconventional way.'³⁹ Indeed it was felt that:

'the more publicity about whom we support would increase our constituency's awareness of the "root causes" behind the grants that we make and that this would be a good thing altogether.'⁴⁰

For many operational agencies working on the government side, the fear of expulsion and of jeopardising the interests of their beneficiaries and local staff, acted a major consideration when deciding whether to support the consortium or engage in public advocacy. While CA was not immune to this fear, given its continued assistance to partner agencies on both sides of the conflict, notably the Christian Relief and Development Association and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and at times felt uncomfortable in its position, it decided early on to publicise its activities. It reasoned that:

'the Christian Relief and Development Association, despite a long working relationship with the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, is part of the "minority church" network in Ethiopia against which action has been taken by the government (Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Mekane Yesus Church). How far it would suffer "guilt by association" with agencies funding the humanitarian work of liberation movements is difficult to say. The Christian Relief and Development Association Executive feels it is walking on a tightrope and asks CA to be "careful." Their position may, however, be easier than that of operational agencies in Ethiopia also assisting REST/ERA. The Christian Relief and Development Association is, after all, not CA. Oxfam is Oxfam wherever it is.'⁴¹

To some extent the situation changed during 1984, with the worsening crisis, the extravagance of the Derg's 10th birthday celebrations in September and the TV coverage of October.⁴² Towards the end of 1984, media interest and public concern fueled an increase in the number of journalists, observers and agencies crossing the border and with it, an increase in the knowledge of non-government areas.⁴³ Within a matter of months, the nature of public debate had undergone a perceptible change, with

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Paul Renshaw, 'Ethiopia, CA and the media: considerations for the formulation of a policy' (11 January 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.412)

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Michael Buerk and Mohamed Amin's film about the situation in Korem and Makelle in northern Ethiopia, was screened on the BBC on 23 October 1984 and then around the world.

⁴³ REST.1, Abadi Zemo

account of government aggression against civilians, political factors in the famine, government abuse of food aid and neglect of famine victims and the importance and fragility of the cross-border operation. By November 1984, ERD members felt confident enough to issue a resolution pointing out that the geography of war meant that the 6 to 7 million people at risk in Eritrea, Tigray, Wollo and Gonder could not be adequately helped without a safe passage for relief supplies. In this resolution, ERD, for the first time, publicly acknowledged the war as a contributing factor to the famine, running counter to the government's view which emphasised drought and environmental degradation. Yet the demands of discretion, a condition for attracting donor support, ensured that a strong public advocacy role was never adopted by ERD. Such a 'neutral' stance was criticised by some member agencies, such as CA who had found themselves involved in a media and political learning process during 1984 and 1985:

'It has been a year in which unprecedented attention has been given in the media to Ethiopian affairs and, for the first time in many of our countries, the first serious attention to the situation in rural Eritrea and Tigray. This has, if CA is typical, involved all our agencies in new responses and new initiatives on the humanitarian and diplomatic levels.'⁴⁴

CA was particularly sensitive to the resentment felt by the Implementing Agencies at ERD's stance with regard to information and how this impacted on notions of partnership. As Rosso, formerly Head of information in ERA, explained:

'the issue that we most criticised was that the famine was caused by the war and the atrocities committed by the Ethiopians, and that if the problems were to be solved, the political causes had to be solved. And we had expected our partners to air our cause and at least come up with an advocacy role. They were not prepared to go further than portray us as victims. We felt that this was not true partnership.'⁴⁵

The internal tension between member agencies was partially 'resolved' by individual members, such as CA, forming bilateral development links with ERA and REST and undertaking advocacy and public campaigning on an individual agency basis, while ERD's collective neutrality was confirmed.

One effect of decisions by member agencies, such as CA, to engage in public

⁴⁴ Paul Renshaw, letter to ERD Members (22 April 1985), (CAO.AF/ME 386)

⁴⁵ ERA.3, Rosso

advocacy was an increasing polarisation of the aid community. Some non-ERD agencies working in Ethiopia had misgivings about the consortium antagonising or compromising efforts on the government side effectively. From the end of 1984, with the increased media exposure of the famine and with it, of the government's abuse of food aid and neglect of famine victims, coupled with increasing reports from non-government areas carrying contrasting accounts of the effectiveness of the Fronts' public welfare policies, divisions between non-ERD and ERD agencies became particularly hostile. In August 1984, Save the Children Fund-UK expressed its concern to CA over its public stance on Eritrea and Tigray. Save the Children Fund felt that to draw media attention to the conflict was having the effect of reducing donor confidence in the Ethiopian government and its Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. It was also alleged to be causing Save the Children Fund problems in Ethiopia due to its association with a fellow British agency.⁴⁶ The very public controversy surrounding the resettlement programme after it had gained media exposure, further entrenched this hostility between agencies.⁴⁷

In Ethiopia, in the mid-1980s, information had an instrumental role in shaping public opinion; sustaining expenditure and lobbying for funds; directing resources; and securing access. The dilemma posed by ERD's need to remain formally 'neutral' and the need, felt by many of its member agencies, to disseminate information about ERA and REST in the absence of international awareness of the operation was thereby crucial, both in terms of fund-raising and in terms of advocacy. While it was partially resolved by the increased media exposure from the mid-1980s, on an individual member agency level, an unsatisfactory dichotomy over 'profile' remained. As Paul Renshaw of CA noted:

'... the policy of ERD is to keep a low profile. CA has, thus, in its coverage of Eritrea/Tigray in Christian Aid News, come to keep ERD out of the picture and has told its constituency of the fact that the relief aid is distributed through REST/ERA. We are thus in a fairly strange position of approving grants to the Sudan Council of Churches/the Emergency Relief Desk because of the sensitive nature of the ultimate recipients but more or less denying the existence of the channel and playing up the ultimate recipients when it comes to publicity. We

⁴⁶ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 88

⁴⁷ For an analysis of the resettlement programme and how it divided agencies see Clay, 'Western assistance and the Ethiopian famine', pp. 163-166

need to resolve this. It is very relevant to the inter-related aid/information questions about this region which are becoming my daily fare.'⁴⁸

Relief and development:

It was argued in chapter 2 that without an approach that addressed the political reality of a given situation and recognised that short-term relief activities needed to take into account future needs and the long-term consequences of their actions, relief would continue to address consequences and not causes. Only an approach that adopted principles of strategic long-term programming, such as participation, the employment of local knowledge, resources, and management capacities would enable relief and development to be linked. Essentially, such an approach was a 'solidarity' one. African Rights has argued:

"Neutral" relief and participatory community development are almost certainly incompatible, and once a relief agency has built up an institutional reputation in one area it will find it very difficult to move to the other.'⁴⁹

As described above, ERA and REST were not merely charitable organisations, following in the wake of one crisis or another. They were an 'organic' part of a national welfare programme aimed at providing long range solutions to long-term problems. To Justin Phipps, of CA, it was clear that 'we should regard the Eritrean People's Liberation Front as a civilian administration in the making.'⁵⁰ How was the challenge - posed by ERA/EPLF and REST/TPLF - to engage in real participatory, community development, and capacity-building met?

At an ERA/Donors Conference in 1983, Justin Phipps, CA's representative, noted how NGOs' limited relief mandates and short term interventionism tended to conflict with long-term rehabilitation and development needs:

'While agency representatives tried to give warning about their own limitations, it was not clear to what extent they are prepared to take up the challenge that in some senses ERA represents to their way of working as agencies, I think that establishing closer links with ERA will require time and effort. All the usual difficulties with liberation movements/constituency are likely to arise, and it may take time for ERA to see that donors usually think in terms of geographically identifiable projects, not national programmes. EPLF is after all trying to set up a government administration, and doing so without the help of the "big gun" NGOs. It must therefore find it hard to "prioritize" requests in the way that we

⁴⁸ Paul Renshaw, memo to Martin/Jenny (18 January 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.290)

⁴⁹ African Rights, *Humanitarianism Unbound?*

⁵⁰ Justin Phipps, 'Report on ERA/donors conference' (27-29 April 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.290)

small agencies want, and to accept the inevitable large shortfall on their financial requests.'⁵¹

A chronic problem in assisting the long-term recovery of peasants in Eritrea and Tigray was the reluctance of major donors to provide adequate inputs for ERA and REST's rehabilitation and development projects. This was largely due to the fact that infrastructural assistance implied political support for the EPLF and TPLF and their national recovery programmes. Particularly sensitive was the issue of transport. Throughout 1985, the main constraint on food distributions via the cross-border operation was trucking capacity.⁵² Yet repeated appeals for new trucks were highly problematic with major donors because of their perceived potential for use in military operations.⁵³

ERD never satisfactorily resolved the debate over providing development assistance in the midst of a conflict and throughout its history, remained internally divided over the relief versus development fault line. Certainly the decision in October 1985 to expand ERD's relief mandate to include rehabilitation inputs was an important step, allowing for the diversification of ERD's public welfare activities through a number of cash programmes - transport, locust control, medical supplies, storage, agricultural rehabilitation, administration. A full development mandate was however consistently rejected. To senior staff in CA, and some other member agencies⁵⁴, ERD was failing to address the issue of structural impoverishment and the opportunities presented by ERA and REST for participatory long-term development:

'the question arises of whether ERD is an adequate means of our relating to Eritrea ... while it can be very helpful as a co-ordinator of emergency relief work, we should be aware that it ultimately amounts to an expatriate intermediary, and we should therefore follow our normal philosophy of developing links with organisations which are more representative of Eritreans themselves. In short, I think that working with ERA more closely than we do at present could seriously test our flexibility as an agency as well as our commitment to 'people' participation.'⁵⁵

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² Extremely rugged roads through mountainous terrain, and the need to move relief supplies at night due to threat of air attack, meant that on average about 20% of ERA and REST's transport fleets were 'off-road' at any given time. Barbara Hendrie, 'Cross-border relief operations in Eritrea and Tigray' *Disasters*, 13 (1990), pp. 351-60

⁵³ Hendrie, 'Cross-border relief operations in Eritrea and Tigray', pp. 351-360

⁵⁴ See Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, pp. 82 & 112

⁵⁵ Justin Phipps, 'Notes on the BCC/CA report on ERA/Donors Conference (13 May 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.199)

To some extent, ERD's limited relief approach represented a strength. It is questionable whether ERD would have been able to attract donor support or indeed continue to hold itself together as a consortium if it had broadened its mandate; and it has been argued that by limiting its mandate, it allowed for ERA and REST to form diversified bilateral relations with individual agencies, thereby ensuring plurality of support and hence reducing the danger of dependency on any single monopoly supplier. As a former chairman of ERD remarked:

'ERA and REST were always shouting at us that our mandate was too limited, but the good thing was that it allowed them to set up other partner networks. They had a very good excuse, we were not doing development. So they hooked into other consortium and partnerships and that was a good development.'⁵⁶

In 1984, CA recognised ERA and REST as bilateral partner organisations. Responding to the 'exciting possibilities for beginning to tackle some of the root causes of poverty',⁵⁷ CA directly supported a number of long-term agricultural programmes initiated by ERA and REST: soil and water conservation in central Tigray; water exploration and well digging in Eritrea; local production of drugs for use by Eritrea's barefoot doctors and health workers; materials and equipment for primary schools in Tigray. Throughout, CA was aware of the political implications involved in supporting development work closely linked to the civilian departments of the Fronts. At the same time, what it was equally aware of, was the fact that 'ERA relates to EPLF departments only insofar as their interests in the civilian population merge';⁵⁸ that humanitarian needs were not being met in Eritrea and Tigray⁵⁹; and that competent indigenous organisations were posing a challenge and real opportunity for effective grass root development and poverty-alleviation.⁶⁰

Demands for rehabilitation, transport and development assistance and the inability of ERD to address these needs also led to the creation of other cross-border consortia. In 1983, the Eritrean Inter-Agency Agricultural Consortium and the Tigray Transport and Agricultural Consortium were formed on the initiative of Roger Briottet

⁵⁶ ERD.3, Jacques Willemsse

⁵⁷ CA, 'Hunger in Africa' (July 1984), (SOAS.CA/J/5)

⁵⁸ Justin Phipps, 'Report on ERA/donors conference' (27-29 April 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.290)

⁵⁹ Paul Renshaw, 'CA, Eritrea and Tigray - what next?' (14 June 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.411)

⁶⁰ Justin Phipps, 'Report on ERA/donors conference' (27-29 April 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.290)

and agencies originally associated with Euro-Action Accord.⁶¹ The Eritrean Inter-Agency Agricultural Consortium initially concentrated on agricultural, veterinary and water drilling programmes, adopting a transport programme in 1989. The Tigray Transport and Agricultural Consortium tackled transport from its inception and, from 1984, agriculture. In her history of the Eritrean consortium, Martine Billanou calculated the assistance generated by it, in the form of trucks, trailers, machinery for road construction, drilling rigs, pumps etc., to be of a value of US \$42 million.⁶² The Eritrean and Tigrayan consortiums tended to have closer organisational association with ERA and REST respectively and by the end of the 1980s, a process whereby power was to be devolved to the indigenous relief associations was firmly in place.⁶³ Both the Eritrean Inter-Agency Agricultural Consortium and the Tigray Transport and Agricultural Consortium wound up their individual functions in 1993. Of the ERD members, CA was alone in being involved in both these consortiums, and between 1989 and 1990 acted, along with Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, as the lead agency. These consortia complemented ERD, enabling donors to support more development-oriented programmes. Talking about the limits of ERD's mandate, a former REST official argued:

'if they [ERD] were trying to get involved in development, I don't think they would have raised as much support as they did. It was not easy for them to go to their donors to get development aid. The Tigray Transport and Agricultural Consortium emerged to fill the gap, it was a good arrangement. While the ERD was busy raising money for relief, the Tigray Transport and Agricultural Consortium was supporting the other needs - supplying hand tools etc.'⁶⁴

Through the cross-border operation, approaches to relief and development were, in many instances, integrated. The cross-border operation played a vital role in empowering the relief associations in Eritrea and Tigray. As a former REST official stated:

'the local capacity-building was the most important part of the operation. We started as a very different organisation and the ERD supported our institution

⁶¹ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 57

⁶² Martine Billanou, *The Eritrea Inter Agency Consortium, 1983-1993: a brief historical review* (EIAC, September 1993)

⁶³ ERD.4, Martine Billanou

⁶⁴ REST.1, Abadi Zemo

and helped build our capacity, both in terms of our management capacity and our resources i.e. trucks.’⁶⁵

By the later part of the 1980s moreover, it was clear that ERD’s cash-supported programmes had moved away from a limited relief brief to include a wider range of rehabilitative activities. Thus while a solidarity position with regard to the civilian governments was never adopted, and the tension between relief and development never resolved by the ERD, the operational reliance of the consortium on REST and ERA and the unique relation of those associations to their respective Fronts, ensured that relief and development were linked in a dynamic way.

The above has highlighted the contradictions in ERD’s approach to the situation in northern Ethiopia. In particular, the social and political dynamics that made the cross-border operation possible were not publicised and the discourse remained divorced from the local reality. The analysis has also shown how CA positioned itself, repeatedly adopting a ‘solidarity’ role and displaying a perceptive analysis of the complex political situation. In particular, senior staff at CA were aware of the impact of the organisation’s own intervention and the implication of this on how it should operate. In contrast to its experience in the 1970s famine, senior staff at CA in the 1980s acknowledged that humanitarianism was political. The suggestion is that a new role had been found. The nature and effectiveness of that role will be analysed in the following section.

3. The Cross-Border Operation Evaluated 1981-91

CA’s prime policy concern in Ethiopia in the 1980s, as indeed in the 1970s, remained how to move from relief to sustainable development. In the context of political and military conflict in the 1980s, such a concern necessarily involved issues of human rights and conflict resolution. In this respect, CA’s mandate, relevant to the Ethiopian policy environment in the 1980s, can be broken down into five basic components. These are: meeting basic needs; development; promotion of justice and rights; mediation

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

and negotiation; and sustainability. CA's role, through the cross-border operation, will be evaluated under these headings.

Meeting basic needs:

Throughout its history, the provision of food aid and additional relief and rehabilitation programmes supported by ERD never matched assessed needs. In 1983, ERD was supporting only around 5% of ERA and REST's requests for food aid.⁶⁶ By 1988/89, the operation had become much more effective but still only met 40% of estimated need.⁶⁷ ERD was never able to meet its Implementing Agencies demands. During the first half of the 1980s, it was limited, largely, by the capacity of ERA and REST, notably transport capacity. In the later 1980s, it was limited by the available resources. However by 1986, ERD's ability to increase the flow of food aid and funds was clearly beginning to have a beneficial impact on the relief situation within Eritrea and Tigray. Monitoring reports indicated improved health, reduced internal migration and some indication of increased herd sizes.⁶⁸ In Eritrea, the Leeds study of 1987 found that while a structural food deficit existed, the operation had been successful in stabilising the short term food requirements of the population.⁶⁹ While food aid was never enough, it was its utilisation as part of the integrated relief strategy managed by REST and ERA, that meant it became a crucial and effective coping mechanism. In this respect, the following analysis focuses on 'how' aid was used rather than 'how much'.

Relief management in Eritrea and Tigray was firmly set in the context of participatory structures of civilian administration established by the EPLF and TPLF respectively. Such structures were characterised by the election of village, district, and regional-level civilian councils responsible for coordinating socio-economic activities and implementing community-based development projects. The relief and development operations of ERA and REST were thus able to relate directly to highly organized

⁶⁶ Kirsty Wright & Max Peberdy, 'Convoy to Tigray: report on the drought in Tigray' (May 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

⁶⁷ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*

⁶⁸ ERD, Annual Report, (1986) cited in Duffield & Prendergast, p. 103

⁶⁹ Leeds University Agricultural & Rural Development Unit, 'Eritrea: food & agriculture assessment study (April 1988), (CAO.AF/ME.434)

administrative structures with roots at village level.⁷⁰ In this way, 'relief distributions were community managed and linked through relations of accountability to the political authority.'⁷¹

Needs assessments were carried out at village committee level and were based on the collection of detailed socio-economic information on household productive capacity and needs.⁷² Lists of beneficiaries were then approved in discussion and with the agreement of the village committees before being forwarded through regional councils to ERA and REST headquarters. At the headquarters, allocations of available resources would be made on a percentage basis in relation to aggregate numbers of beneficiaries in each administrative zone. Relief distributions were then carried out at district centres by ERA/REST workers in the presence of village council members who ensured that targeted families within their respective communities received their supplies. The village councils had the responsibility for organising the onward transport of goods by pack animal back to the village.⁷³ Through a lengthy but democratic process, 'it was the village committees who took responsibility at the grassroots for identifying needs, guaranteeing the fair and accurate distribution of supplies, and co-ordinating the final leg of transportation.'⁷⁴ Such a method of needs assessment and food distribution was essentially pro-active. As Duffield and Prendergast have written: 'it takes account of expected trends and, unlike the collection of nutritional stress indicators favoured by many international relief agencies, favours attempts to conserve assets.'⁷⁵ Most significantly, it addressed the need to preserve livelihoods, providing an integrated approach to short-term relief and long-term development.

The dominant impression from field reports, monitoring missions and independent observations was of a high degree of professionalism and competence. Carlisle Patterson, Head of CA's Aid Department, wrote:

⁷⁰ Hendrie, 'Cross-border relief operations in Eritrea and Tigray', p. 355

⁷¹ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 28

⁷² Arild Jacobsen, 'Report on field visit to Eritrea' (16 September - 16 October 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.385)

⁷³ Hendrie, 'Cross-border relief operations in Eritrea and Tigray', pp. 355-356

⁷⁴ Barbara Hendrie, 'Field report from Eritrea' (April 1986), (CAO.AF/ME.386)

⁷⁵ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 24

'we have full confidence in the ability of ERD to administer the aid responsibly and in REST and ERA themselves to distribute it according to strict humanitarian criterion and to afford full facilities for reporting and monitoring.'⁷⁶

Operational flexibility was ensured by decentralised administration and the continual updating of assistance requirements by the civilian councils. Distributions were 'efficient and orderly, and display a spirit of co-operation aimed at solving community problems.'⁷⁷ And targeting effectively addressed the most vulnerable:

'[the relief programmes of ERA and REST] effectively targeted commonly unsupported population groups, including women ... and the programming has begun to both erode the socio-economic inequalities that have contributed to unequal and limited development, and to combat the effects of drought and epidemics.'⁷⁸

The conclusion drawn by Paul Renshaw of CA, following a visit to Eritrea in March 1984, was that, 'the ability of ERA to provide assistance to people in need ... is limited more by lack of resources than organisational capacity.'⁷⁹

ERA and REST's competence in the field was complemented by an approach that was strongly oriented to maintaining livelihoods and working with the people. An approach that aimed to involve local communities in the management of their own relief and use local skills and resources. REST's management of the enormous displacement of people both internally in Tigray and externally into Sudan highlighted how relief was not perceived in narrow terms of 'saving lives' but always maintained a long-term perspective aimed at supporting coping strategies and maintaining 'livelihoods'. By March/April 1983, following the failure of rains in 1982, an estimated 350-400,000 people had been forced westward in search of food and work.⁸⁰ Between March and June of that year, REST established and administered 17 reception centres in the western region and in the drought source areas. Approximately 100,000 migrants were received and given food and medical treatment, as far as supplies permitted. The remaining 300,000 were directed to villages in Shire and Wolkeit districts where their

⁷⁶ Carlisle Patterson, letter to D. L. Stanton (30 May 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.290)

⁷⁷ Barbara Hendrie, 'Field report from Eritrea' (April 1986), (CAO.AF/ME.386)

⁷⁸ Gayle E. Smith, 'Briefing document on Eritrea and Tigray' (February 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.199)

⁷⁹ Paul Renshaw, Inter-office memo (March 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.199)

⁸⁰ John English, Jon Bennett, Bruce Dick, 'Tigray 1984: an investigation' (January 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

absorption by the local communities was arranged.⁸¹ As far as possible efforts were made to keep migrating communities together in groups with at least some of their elected administrators. Migrating communities were integrated in to the administration of the area through the election of Emergency Relief Committees which would establish links with the corresponding committee of the local administration. Emergency Relief Committees would undertake needs assessment, relief distribution and help stimulate economic activity, thereby involving the drought victims in their own relief.⁸² Most significantly, a high degree of accountability to the receiving villages was maintained. Potential problems were discussed at public meetings in all the villages where migrants were to be distributed and rules of conduct were established for the handling of the migrant communities: migrant families should help in the day-to-day domestic and agricultural work of the families they lived with; and migrants who were sick were to be allocated to Reception Centres to avoid the possible outbreak of epidemics.⁸³ The whole approach aimed at creating accountable and hence, as far as possible, sustainable communities.

Due to the largely successful settlement of displaced drought victims in western Tigray few of the 1983 migrants found their way across the Sudan border. This situation was to deteriorate dramatically between October 1984 and May 1985 when approximately 200,000 Tigrayans crossed the border to eastern Sudan.⁸⁴ Many lived within 1 or 2 days' walk from government-controlled towns where international agencies were providing food aid and medical assistance. They chose to make the 4-5 week walk to Sudan out of fear of resettlement or of being identified as TPLF sympathisers. Once again, the migrants were supported by the REST pipeline described above. It is important to note that this exodus only ever represented a temporary survival strategy to the migrants involved. Consequently, by March, even while migrants were still arriving, small groups of people, mainly male heads of households,

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² Kirsty Wright, 'The administration of the drought relief operation' (August 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Hendrie, 'Do we see famine as it is?'

began leaving the camps. By early May, a trickle had become a flood and 7,000 people were leaving every night. Out of a total of 200,000 people who entered Sudan in 1985, 70,000 returned the same year. In 1986 and 1987, a further 100,000 people returned home.⁸⁵ The returnees were again assisted by REST. Guided by REST field workers, they would walk in village groups to transit camps inside Tigray where food rations, water and medical care would be provided. The village groups would have elected committees for medical needs, relief distribution, administration and security during the return journey.⁸⁶ Once people crossed the border, they were immediately re-integrated into the assistance program of REST inside Tigray, which included the distribution of agricultural rehabilitation inputs - seeds, tools, oxen etc.⁸⁷

This repatriation was not supported by most international donors, most notably the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, who argued that since the war and famine were still raging, populations should not return.⁸⁸ In doing so, they failed to fully appreciate the nature of the migration strategy and the concerns or priorities of the farmers. Migration was only ever a temporary dry season survival strategy. For rural households, it made sense to send the most vulnerable groups to Sudan for the months just prior to harvest, when food supply was lowest, and to send heads of households and active producers back to Tigray at the same time, in order to take advantage of the spring rains. While REST supported this strategy, United Nations aid officials in Sudan were unable to comprehend why people were moving in two directions at once, both coming and going across the border. In this respect, they failed to understand that local survival strategies were as much about saving lives as saving livelihoods; and that it was vital for farmers not to lose a single season of cultivation. The rainy season of 1985 was in fact good and many households that had been refugees in Sudan only months before were able to obtain some food from their own production.⁸⁹

Institutionally, CA supported REST's strategy. There were three main reasons for this:

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Barbara Hendrie, 'Report on REST repatriation programme' (1 March 1987), (CAO.AF/ME.385)

⁸⁷ Hendrie, 'Do we see famine as it is?'

⁸⁸ For an account of this discrepancy between the priorities of international donors and those of the Tigrayans see Hendrie, 'Knowledge and power', pp. 57-76

⁸⁹ Hendrie, 'Do we see famine as it is?'

CA was committed to partnership with REST, both bilaterally and through the ERD; senior staff members wanted to get involved not just in relief but in development and as far as possible wanted to keep farmers on their land to enable this transition; and senior staff were aware of the Ethiopian government's military strategy that underlay the migration and recognised the political need to keep the Tigrayan farmers on their land.⁹⁰

The meeting of other basic needs similarly reflected the reciprocity between the victims of famine, the indigenous relief associations and the Fronts. It has been argued above that the public welfare policy of the Fronts and their respective relief associations ensured that, even by the end of the 1970s, impressive levels of health coverage had been achieved. That ERA and REST were able to broaden their public welfare programmes to include programmes in water supply, seed collection and agricultural extension attested not only to the policies of the Fronts but also to the growing effectiveness of the cross-border operation in stabilising the situation.

The security needs of the civilian populations were also met by the Fronts who endeavoured to protect migration and relief routes. Indeed, civilian protection was a key military strategy, the physical survival of the peasantry being crucial to the political survival of the Fronts. However, it was within this context of reciprocity that donors, such as the United States, voiced concerns about the impact of the operation on the fortunes of war. By the end of the 1980s, it became apparent to ERD members and donors that the relief management systems developed by the Fronts and their respective relief associations had stabilised the public welfare crisis, although most recognised that structural food deficits still existed.⁹¹ It was also recognised that 'stabilisation' in 1986/1987 was followed, in 1988, by significant military advances by the Fronts. While donors, such as the United States, tended to worry about the direct diversion of aid to the military, an accusation that has not been substantiated, ERD members, such as CA, were more aware of the operation's real military impact. As Jacques Willemse, former Chairman of ERD, explained:

⁹⁰ ERD.6, Paul Renshaw

⁹¹ Leeds University Agricultural & Rural Development Unit, 'Eritrea: food & agriculture assessment study' (April 1988), (CAO.AF/ME.434)

'in the late 1980s, we [ERD members] became more and more a factor in the war, for we allowed the Tigrayans to keep their people where they were which was a contribution to the resistance. And in Eritrea we avoided a further massive outflow of people due to the fact that there was no food, which gave the EPLF political capital with the local people.'⁹²

By stabilising the food crisis in Eritrea and Tigray, the Fronts could sustain the support of the growing numbers of people under their expanding administration so that their own resources could be directed to the war effort.⁹³ While well aware of this situation, Paul Renshaw explained CA's position in the 1980s on this issue:

'There are those who would say that the likes of CA prolonged the war. As far as I recall, it wasn't a subject that was discussed - the war and the effect of the relief operation on the war ... so, beyond the occasional, almost rhetorical questions - what can we do? - I don't recall it being a central concern in those days. There was nothing that the Derg was doing that was commending us to take any other line. You have to keep a balanced view of that.'⁹⁴

By 1990/91, individuals within CA were however taking a more political and strategic position on the continuation of war. Jenny Borden, Head of Overseas Aid at CA commented:

'I was completely convinced that the war would not stop until it was won. And that the EPLF had the best interests of the people at heart and the majority of people were in support of them. Therefore the best thing to do was to give them humanitarian support whilst they got on with winning the war.'⁹⁵

Staff within CA, supporting an illicit cross-border operation, were aware that keeping people alive in an internal war was political. Moreover by 1984, from staff visits and increased independent reporting, it was recognised that the political legitimacy of the Fronts was based on their ability to sustain livelihoods and prevent famine and that they were not conventional armies diverting relief grain.⁹⁶ This contrasted to government areas, where CA staff were aware of the predatory nature of the Derg, a key feature of which was the creation of famine and increased insecurity of civilian populations. In this respect, sensitivities about the war tended not to be discussed. Ultimately, senior staff were aware that the political, and hence military, survival of the Fronts was crucial to the cross-border operation's aims of meeting basic needs.

⁹² ERD.3, Jacques Willemsse

⁹³ 'This stabilisation was a necessary precondition for the great military advances of 1988.' Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 163

⁹⁴ ERD.6, Paul Renshaw

⁹⁵ ERD.9, Jenny Borden

⁹⁶ ERD.6, Paul Renshaw; & ERD.9, Jenny Borden

Development:

It has been argued above that ERD never fully resolved the tension over providing development assistance in the midst of conflict but that its limited mandate represented a strength both in attracting sensitive donor support; and in enabling ERA and REST to diversify the internationally supported programmes in Eritrea and Tigray by establishing bilateral relationships with individual ERD members, like CA, and becoming members of other CA-supported consortia. Moreover, from the mid-1980s, the nature of ERD's support underwent a significant change, albeit within a limited relief and rehabilitation remit. During 1986, ERD progressively met more of ERA and REST's demands for assistance with transport and administrative costs. In addition, ERD increased its direct cash payments to ERA and REST, supporting a diversified range of activities such as locust control, medical supplies, the purchase of rehabilitation inputs such as seed, tools, and oxen, and storage. These fed into a number of agricultural development programmes which both REST and ERA had been involved in implementing from the beginning - soil conservation, water preservation, irrigation, reafforestation, introduction of new crops and animal husbandry.

Other important development initiatives that the cross-border operation supported were the internal purchase and resettlement programmes both in Tigray. The internal purchase programme was a particularly important component of REST's relief programme, involving the purchase of locally produced grain in western and southern surplus areas of Tigray for distribution in eastern and central deficit areas. ERD began to support the programme in 1983 when crop failure in Sudan prevented the further purchase of Sudanese sorghum. The programme had implications for development in that it not only increased the total tonnage of food available for distribution, without increasing the cross-border transport load but encouraged the re-establishment of a grain market infrastructure, giving farmers an incentive to increase production and enabling small traders to increase their activity and expand purchasing and transport networks into areas previously unserved by an integrated market. It thereby stimulated local agricultural production and marketing structure; provided farmers with cash and seasonal labourers with work; increased the capacity of REST to reach people in their

home areas thus reducing migration; and did not alter local consumption patterns, thereby preventing 'dependency'.⁹⁷

REST's resettlement scheme, initiated in 1980, was another important strategy and was very much orientated towards 'working with the people' to address issues of long-term vulnerability. There were 7 such schemes in Tigray, all located in the more fertile west.⁹⁸ REST's management of the programme provided a stark comparison with that of the government's, discussed earlier: the programme was voluntary; sites were selected after careful study of water resources, wood supply, health conditions and grazing land supply; the heads of families requesting resettlement and approved by village resettlement committees would inspect the sites before committing; upon arrival, participants would be given a plot of land, seeds, house-building materials and access to health care facilities; and land remained the property of the village council although the settler had the right of use while he fulfilled the conditions of resettlement.⁹⁹ Unlike the forced resettlement programme operated by the government, REST's programme was characterised by voluntarism, good management and accountability to the receiving community. In this respect, it represented a genuine rehabilitation strategy.

Most significantly, the growing activity and increasing effectiveness of the cross-border operation from the mid-1980s impacted on organisational development of the ERA and REST themselves. As Jacques Willemse, former Chairman of ERD, explained:

'in the beginning they were not all that capable. ERD as a group invested a lot of money and time in helping them develop organisational structures. Our monitoring system was also used to help them organise their operations. They developed as we developed. We also started on a very small scale, somewhat amateuristic but became a rather professional operation on both side.'¹⁰⁰

Evidence of organisational growth is most readily available for REST. A reorganisation of administrative capacity in 1985 and a radical redevelopment of their disaster management programme during 1986 enabled REST to withstand the return of famine

⁹⁷ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, pp. 144-147

⁹⁸ Kirsty Wright & Max A Peberdy, 'Convoy to Tigray: report on the drought in Tigray' (May 1984), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

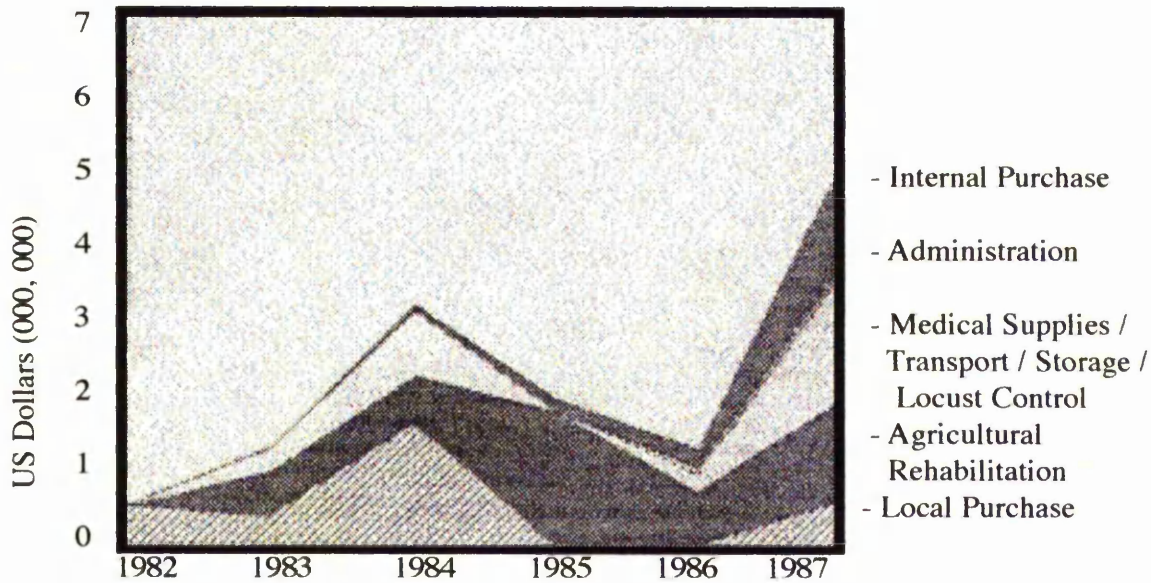
¹⁰⁰ ERD.3, Jacques Willemse

conditions in 1987 and prevent a renewed refugee influx into Sudan. The basis of this new programme was an improvement in relief capacity and the provision of alternative survival strategies in the villages: food aid distribution, using the baito system of community recommendation was improved - in 1986 26,000 Mt. (9,200 Mt. from ERD and 9,000 Mt. from internal purchase) were mobilised, by 1987, REST was moving 5,000 Mt. per month and internal purchase had expanded to 27,000 MT; transport capacity was increased from 27 trucks in 1984 to around 150 in 1986 and new roads were built by the TPLF; in 1986, 53,000 families were provided with basic agricultural inputs; food for work programmes were established in central region; opportunities for wage labour were expanded, TPLF encouraging wealthier farmers to increase their cultivated area and take on as labourers those not receiving food aid in exchange for agricultural inputs - in 1987, 500,000 farmers were assisted in the Western Region in finding work.¹⁰¹

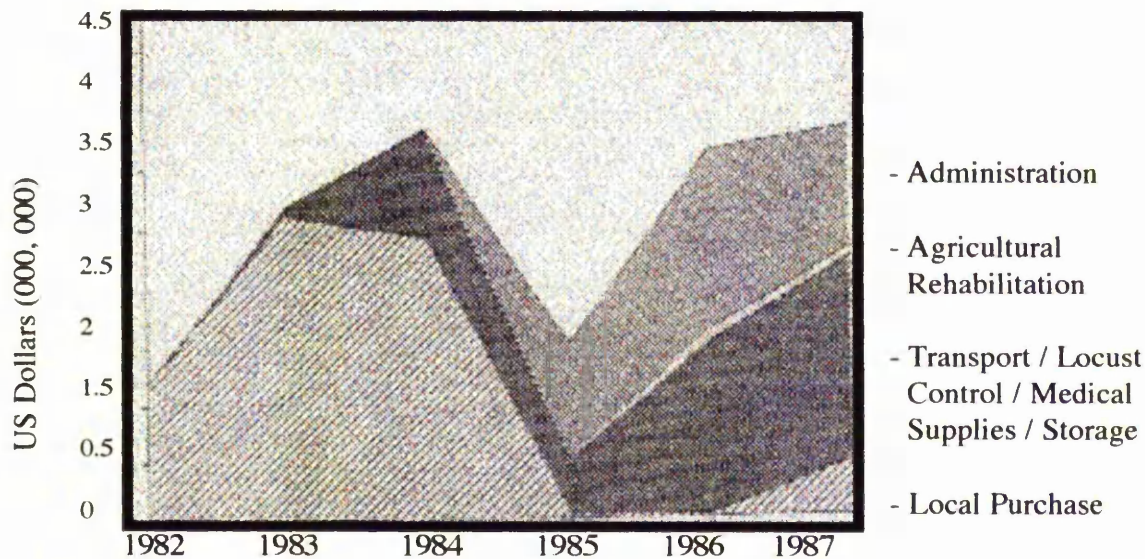
What was apparent was an empowerment of indigenous capabilities through sustained external support. Such support included material aid but also, significantly, the establishment of credibility. Gained from ERD's support and recognition, this credibility enabled ERA and REST to expand and diversify their relationships with the international aid community. It empowered them vis-à-vis the donors, having important implications both for development and sustainability.¹⁰² Independent pursuit of advocacy by individual ERD agencies, notably CA, was a crucial contributing factor to this empowerment.

¹⁰¹ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 104

¹⁰² ERA.3, Roso

Chart 5.2 Cash Programmes in Tigray 1982-87

Source: Mark Duffield & John Prendergast, *Without Troops & Tanks: humanitarian intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Red Sea Press: New Jersey, 1994), p. 105

Chart 5.3 Cash Programmes in Eritrea 1982-87

Source: Mark Duffield & John Prendergast, *Without Troops & Tanks: humanitarian intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Red Sea Press: New Jersey, 1994), p. 105

Promotion of Justice and Rights:

Throughout its history, ERD was limited to maintaining a low profile. As Jacques Willemse, former Chairman of ERD, explained:

'a strong advocacy role, certainly in the beginning, would have jeopardised the operation completely. It would also have broken up ERD. ERD was not in that sense, a united front. At the end of the day, what kept it together, was really the worries that we had about the population in those places. And the one expressed that in political terms and the other in religious and the other in humanitarian terms.'¹⁰³

Justice and rights were promoted in so much as the 'war in Eritrea and Tigray, was never a forgotten war, we [ERD] kept on publicising.'¹⁰⁴ Through monitoring missions and field reports, ERD and its member agencies like CA enabled a 'flow of words'. Despite maintaining a neutral stance, ERD essentially gave ERA and REST a public forum in which needs and grievances could both be aired and substantiated. Indeed, in this respect, neutrality was a clear advantage in that it assured ERD of a non-partisan position and enabled it to act as honest broker. In addition, from the mid-1980s, individual members such as CA campaigned on an independent basis to increase public awareness of the situation in Eritrea and Tigray. Such campaigns relied heavily on information coming through ERD channels. Ultimately however, a human rights agenda was not fully endorsed by the cross-border operation. Nor was the true nature of the operation publicised. In this respect an opportunity to endorse an anti-famine practice rooted in a social contract that saw famine as a political scandal was missed.¹⁰⁵

Mediation and Negotiation:

In many respects, ERD's neutral stance strengthened its position with regard to behind the scenes diplomacy. As Jacques Willemse, former Chairman of ERD, commented:

'Behind the scenes, both TPLF and EPLF, I think EPLF more, used our network for diplomatic approaches and visits. We were very neutral but we gave them, from 1983/1984, a public forum. ... they won the war themselves, but politically, I think, we gave them a lot of tacit support.'¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ ERD.3, Jacques Willemse

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ For an elaboration of social contract theories as they apply to famine prevention strategies see De Waal, 'Social contract', pp. 194-205

¹⁰⁶ ERD.3, Jacques Willemse

Acting as an honest broker, ERD was able to facilitate a number of meetings between ERA and REST and the Ethiopian government in early 1984. The purpose of these meeting was ostensibly to secure a safe passage, whereby relief trucks would be allowed to move out from government-held towns into the non-government controlled countryside. The meetings broke down as highlighted above. However in 1990, through the mediation efforts of ERD, representatives of the Joint Relief Partnership (the main Ethiopian NGO consortium which included the Ethiopian Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox churches together with the American based Catholic Relief Services), the TPLF and REST met secretly in Khartoum to again discuss arrangements for a free passage, whereby aid would be channeled into eastern Tigray and Wollo from government-held areas in the south. The meetings this time succeeded and the plan became known as the Southern Line Operation. As Willemse argued, 'it took care of quite an extensive part of the population that it was difficult for us [ERD/REST] to reach from the other side of the mountains.'¹⁰⁷ During 1990, this operation delivered an average of 9,000 Mt. per month to Tigray and 3,000 Mt. to northern Wollo.

ERD's neutral stance also enabled it to act as a buffer if things went wrong. Such an event occurred on 23 October 1987 when a convoy of 30 trucks, including 24 Band Aid trucks carrying relief supplies, was attacked and destroyed by the EPLF, 51 kms south of Asmara. International condemnation was quick to follow, especially amongst the Addis Ababa based donors, such as the United Nations, United States Agency for International Development and the European Community. Donors were quick to interpret the attack as part of a change of policy by the liberation movements.¹⁰⁸ The EPLF responded with a statement:

'the Addis regime is continuing to use relief supplies as a cover to transport military hardware and move about its troops through otherwise inaccessible routes in Eritrea ... the Derg's regime has moreover decided to escort all relief supplies with an enlarged military convoy.'¹⁰⁹

While condemning the action, ERD and its member agencies such as CA, pursued a damage limitation policy as explained by Jacques Willemse:

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Justin Phipps, memo to Tom (7 December 1987), (CAO.AF/ME.411)

¹⁰⁹ EPLF, telex to all donor agencies active in Eritrea (1 November 1987), (CAO.AF/ME.411)

'we explained to the European Community, United States Agency for International Development and other donors that the Ethiopians had indeed been mixing the convoys all the time; and that the United Nations was not sticking to its own rules - food only - but was using these mixed convoys to transport its food.'¹¹⁰

In November, ERD arranged a meeting in Khartoum at which the EPLF was invited to put their version of the incident to the donor and NGO community. The result was a draft agreement with the EPLF, co-signed by ERD, Band Aid and Oxfam-UK, establishing a mechanism to coordinate the movement of relief trucks entering EPLF controlled areas of Eritrea from the government side. It is notable that the UN rejected the request to help in carrying forward the plan.¹¹¹

Continually from 1989, there were discussions among ERD member agencies about whether the ERD should be doing more to bring the war to an end. Such discussions grew out of concern felt by some members that humanitarian relief itself was prolonging the war, feeding people today only for them to be killed tomorrow. Ultimately, internal divisions within the ERD prevented any involvement in peace advocacy on a united front. When calls for a political resolution were finally made in May 1991, as concerns that assistance was prolonging the war reached a climax, the war was already within days of ending. It has been argued above that such concerns for peace were misplaced. The struggle of the TPLF and EPLF was essentially a war against famine and in this respect, a long-term humanitarian agenda demanded that the 'war be played out to its decisive climax.'¹¹² Certainly this was the position of key individuals within CA at the time who felt that the facilitation of cease-fires and safe zones might represent an accommodation with rather than a resolution of violence by separating the politics from humanitarian relief.¹¹³ For the consortium, tensions between 'neutrality' and 'involvement' were becoming increasingly apparent and by 1991, if war had not come to an end, it is arguable that a charitable peace would have been pursued at the expense of political resolution.

¹¹⁰ ERD.3, Jacques Willemse

¹¹¹ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 111

¹¹² African Rights, *Humanitarianism Unbound?*

¹¹³ ERD.9, Jenny Borden

Sustainability:

The extent to which the cross-border operation left a lasting legacy will be examined in respect of its political as well as humanitarian heritage. It has been argued above that the cross-border operation divided agencies, with those NGOs working exclusively on the government side adopting a defensive and hostile attitude to those who were seen to be playing politics with the 'rebels'. When the 'rebels' came to power in 1991, such attitudes persisted. To this end, some members in ERD felt that a forum for agency discussion which would allow the sharing of experience and bridge-building between those that had worked on different sides of the line was required. It was envisaged that such a forum would be supported until the official phase out of ERD activities, set for 1 June 1993. The aim was to publicise the ERD experience within the wider NGO community; and initiate dialogue between ERD members, ERA and REST, and the Ethiopian church agencies and consortia in order to develop cooperation and greater understanding and hence lay the foundations for a more stable and sustainable future.

Such efforts to leave a lasting heritage were to fail. Many church agencies, often with large Oromo and southern following, felt that ERD was politically linked to the rebels and that the new Tigrayan-dominated government would exact some form of retribution on those NGOs that had operated under the Derg; or that the government would transfer all resources from the rest of Ethiopia to Tigray. Hopes for a bridge-building role were also undermined by fragmentation amongst ERD's own ranks, reflecting agency's different histories and approaches. Many member agencies simply did not believe in such a role. Those with former church links, preferred to resume their traditional bilateral relations. Senior staff within CA felt that, as an organisation which had historically and consistently been involved on both sides of the conflict, CA had an important role to play just through continuing to work with its partners.¹¹⁴ By 1992, it was clear that attempts to bridge suspicion and misunderstanding between the main church agencies and the government; to educate about the different relief model pursued

¹¹⁴ CA. 5, Sarah Hughes; & ERD.9, Jenny Borden

with such success in non-government areas; and to facilitate dialogue between the new government and Oromo Relief Association/Oromo Liberation Front, in an atmosphere of increasing tension between the two, had failed.¹¹⁵ In this respect, the participatory relief models pioneered by ERA and REST went unpublicised; the more centralised conventional models pursued in government-areas left unchallenged; and an opportunity for resolving political instability by mediating between the Oromo Liberation Front and the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front passed over. For some, this seriously undermined prospects for a smooth transition to peace and development and opportunities to engage with the political and long-term complexity of post-conflict development.¹¹⁶

The 'development' picture was no brighter. A study carried out in Eritrea by Leeds University in 1987 and 1991, found that while in 1987, 62% households were classed as 'poor', this figure had risen to 78% by 1991.¹¹⁷ Serious depletion of the rural asset base had clearly occurred. Moreover, most provinces had also witnessed a severe reduction in herd size and, for poor farmers in particular, the lack of draught oxen was an important limitation on production. While, 'the cross-border operation had helped to stabilise the humanitarian crisis by 1987, it was insufficient to prevent a continuing impoverishment.'¹¹⁸ The governments of Eritrea and Tigray on gaining power, faced an unresolved material and financial deficit in the face of growing popular demand. In Eritrea in 1992, the case of the estimated 500,000 refugees - about 20% of Eritrea's total population - awaiting repatriation from Sudan at the close of the war highlighted the scale of the problem.¹¹⁹

In one important respect however, sustainability in the sense of enhancing capacities was ensured. It has been argued above that self-reliance was a key

¹¹⁵ In June 1992, OLF withdrew from the transitional government, unleashing the fear of continuing political instability within Ethiopia. ERD had links with both REST and ORA and consequently it was thought that ERD could help in promoting some degree of reconciliation.

¹¹⁶ ERD.6, Jacques Willemsse

¹¹⁷ Leeds University Agricultural & Rural Development Unit, 'Eritrea: food & agriculture assessment study' (April 1988), (CAO.AF/ME.434)

¹¹⁸ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 134

¹¹⁹ Elias Habte-Selassie, 'Eritrean refugees in the Sudan: a preliminary analysis of voluntary repatriation' in Doornbos et al. (eds.), *Beyond Conflict in The Horn*, pp. 23-31

component of the Front's political agenda. As Justin Phipps of CA wrote:

'in spite of the difficulties posed by its status as a liberation movement ... EPLF seems able to attract support from a surprisingly broad spectrum of people and I suspect that this is in part due to its humanitarian and non-doctrinaire approach. There seems to be something rather special about the Eritrean experience; it is rare to find such an enthusiastic commitment to self-reliance, which goes beyond mere rhetoric. Such an approach probably means that outside aid has to be given very much on Eritrea terms - something which donor may not always find easy to come to terms with.'¹²⁰

Moreover, this study has shown how ERD empowered ERA and REST - through capacity-building and the strengthening of credibility - thereby supporting such a commitment to self-reliance. Most importantly, while international substitution for indigenous public welfare capacity, in terms of the Fronts increasing dependency on donor governments for financial and material aid, clearly occurred, it was significant that the operation of the relief and development system remained firmly under indigenous management. The implications for post-conflict development were profound. As Jacques Willemse, former Chairman of ERD, explained:

'a year ago [1995], we had a meeting in Addis Ababa between the local agencies and the government. I was invited along with a couple of other ERD people. We were treated by the [non-ERD] agencies with hostility. We had spoiled their paradise - now things are far more difficult for them. Now they have to be accountable to the system - there are a lot of questions asked if you have 17 different types of hand pumps etc. There is a Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, which comes basically from the REST structure, and they have learnt to work with NGOs and keep an eye on them.'¹²¹

Despite international material substitution, indigenous managerial independence had not only been maintained but strengthened. The new Relief and Rehabilitation Commission in Ethiopia currently operates an Emergency Code, aimed at decentralising the management of relief; taking control out of the hands of northern NGOs by making them more accountable; and ensuring that northern NGO activities fit in with regional development plans. In Eritrea, a new policy enforced by the Provisional Government in 1994 prohibited foreign agencies from being 'operational' in Eritrea, reserving this role entirely for Eritreans. Donor agencies were restricted from paying Eritrean staff higher than prevailing in-country rates, to prevent them from pulling skilled people out of government service or private-sector activity; and were required to account for all funds

¹²⁰ Justin Phipps, 'Report on ERA/donors conference' (27-29 April 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.290)

¹²¹ ERD.3, Jacques Willemse

spent in Eritrea, with no more than 10% to be used for office overheads. Most importantly, donor agencies were limited to supporting projects that fell within the country's national and regional development plans. As one government official noted, 'the basic lesson from our independence struggle is that we were able to win the war on a very self-reliant basis. This is a very important lesson for the future as well.'¹²²

For many members, the rationale for phasing out ERD was to re-establish more traditional links and forms of NGO activity. In this sense, an opportunity for institutionalising the successful relief model operated by the Fronts was missed. Principles of 'participation' and 'working with' the people' were, in a large number of cases, surrendered to the more conventional 'neutral' model of externally-managed, non-participatory interventions. At the same time, however, the experience of the ERD had changed the operating environment in a profound way. The empowerment of REST and ERA created an atmosphere of donor accountability. As the former General Secretary of the Eritrea Inter Agency Consortium remarked: 'both in Eritrea and Ethiopia, you now have to deal with people who are not afraid of the international community.'¹²³ With regard to prospects for the future development of Ethiopia and Eritrea, such a legacy of the operation can not be underestimated. Indeed, as CA had argued in its 1987 corporate Statement of Commitment, it was through such principles of self-reliance that prospects of meaningful and sustainable development seem most likely.

The evidence suggests that CA's role in Ethiopia in the 1980s, through the cross-border operation, reflected a broad relief-development agenda. However, it was the relations between the ruler and ruled in non-government areas that ultimately determined the efficacy and fundamental nature of its impact. While the consortium was crucial in that it gave the victims in Eritrea and Tigray a channel for aid and a forum for recognition - 'it was only when ERD gave a channel, that world relief came, not only

¹²² Yemane Gebreab, head of the political section of the Peoples' Front for Democracy and Justice cited in 'Eritrea's economic success story' *New African*, February 1995

¹²³ ERD.4, Martine Billanou

food aid but also help with logistics - trucks'¹²⁴ - and kept people alive, it was only 'successful' in that it supported an 'outstanding model of famine relief and prevention grounded upon an inclusive social contract.'¹²⁵ Relief and development needs were met, not out of charity and the supply of physical goods, but because of political accountability and the support of progressive internal political relations. The efficacy of CA's role in the 1980s famine, mediated through the ERD, lay in its constructive engagement with civil society, a relationship facilitated by indigenous liberation fronts and their respective relief associations.

4. Christian Aid in Ethiopia 1981-91: an analysis of capability

The above analysis of the Emergency Relief Desk and CA's role in it has presented a critical reflection on CA's evolving capabilities in the 1980s in Ethiopia. On one level CA's involvement in the cross-border operation provided a radical critique of conventional models of assistance which had been typically set up to deliver visible relief, as in Ethiopia in the mid-1970s, and had failed to address the social and political dimensions of the crisis. Through the cross-border operation, CA pursued an innovative approach which effectively supported indigenous anti-famine social contracts in Eritrea and Tigray.¹²⁶ For CA, it was time when ideas about partnership, participatory development and grassroots social change were debated and implemented in a committed manner, albeit by a small number of involved staff.

On another level, CA's experience through the cross-border operation reflected structural problems that continued to determine how famine was perceived and what actions were taken. Notable was the effect of the 'official discourse' on the famine. This, largely set by the media and unchallenged by the major donors, reflected a bias towards a 'natural disaster' interpretation. The crucial broadcast of October 1984 used religious imagery - 'a Biblical famine'¹²⁷ and metaphors of hostile nature - 'the closet

¹²⁴ ERA.3, Roso

¹²⁵ De Waal, 'Human rights', chapter 6, p. 47

¹²⁶ The idea of anti-famine social contracts has been developed in De Waal, 'Social contract', pp. 194-205

¹²⁷ Michael Buerk's narration of the 23 October 1984 film about the Ethiopian famine screened on the BBC and then worldwide

thing to Hell on earth'¹²⁸ - to describe a famine that was political. While the knowledge about the famine did change, the ability to educate the public about the real causes and processes of famine remained constrained by the overriding respect accorded state sovereignty. Famine was still portrayed as a natural and neutral 'event'. This created a fundamental contradiction with regard to the operation's profile and for individual ERD member agencies, such as CA, ensured an uneasy dichotomy between fund-raising and where the money actually went. The norms of international relations and donor government sensitivities', along with the conventions of media representation created an official interpretation of events divorced from the reality. This left agencies such as CA with little room for manoeuvre.

The study has shown how these different levels of experience impacted on each other and how the consortium, in general, and CA, in particular, attempted to overcome structural limitations: for the consortium, the alternative interpretation and structure it offered was screened by a 'neutral' a-political public profile; for CA, independent advocacy and bilateral partnerships were pursued. Ultimately however, the fundamental nature of the cross-border operation was not publicised. This shortcoming meant that after the closure of the ERD, the operation's model of relief-development was abandoned. While the writing of ERD's official history in 1994 was certainly important in documenting events¹²⁹, for CA, the absence of rigorous analysis of its own experience appears to have resulted in a mystification of the operation. Lessons do not appear to have been shared or institutionalised; practice has not informed theory.¹³⁰ This has had crucial implications, impacting directly on CA's capabilities in the 1990s. As one REST official remarked:

'I feel that CA has stopped discussing things with REST. During the war, CA was very involved and was asking lots of questions about politics. They are not doing that any more. They are not asking about government policies. Development needs are about politics. We need the kind of brainstorming and strategy discussion that has been missing since the late 1980s.'¹³¹

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*

¹³⁰ ERD.6, Paul Renshaw; ERD.9, Jenny Borden; & CA.5, Sarah Hughes

¹³¹ REST.7, Berhane Wolde Tensaie

That practice was not institutionalised, points to a third level of analysis on CA's capabilities in the 1980s, focused not on 'how' CA acted but on 'why'. In many ways CA's experience in the cross-border operation reflected a conjuncture of specific historical events rather than the expression of clear strategy. As Paul Renshaw commented on the motivation behind CA's initial involvement:

'In Eritrea and Tigray there evolved a kind of accumulation of feelings - one was respect for the people and their work, another was an observation that there were a lot of people up there who were simply not able to be reached through Addis and the international community wasn't even trying to reach them through Addis and couldn't anyway. So, I guess, we, as an NGO, felt that we should do what we could to forge relationships irrespective of the politics.'¹³²

CA was not ideologically committed, as say War on Want, to the situation in northern Ethiopia. Its response was essentially pragmatic and humanitarian.¹³³ It was historical relations with the other European ecumenical agencies that made up the consortium, such as Norwegian Church Aid, and, most importantly, the unique challenge offered by the indigenous structures of ERA/EPLF and REST/TPLF at the time that motivated and determined the nature of CA's role. As Paul Renshaw of CA remarked:

'It was ERA and REST that first approached CA. ... the liberated areas of Eritrea and Tigray were just like blank areas on the map - nobody knew a thing.'¹³⁴

Certainly, with increasing personal experience and knowledge of the situation in northern Ethiopia, relevant staff at CA did begin to define a more strategic role for the organisation as seen in an increased commitment to advocacy and to a broader developmental role. To a significant part this was aided by close contact with various solidarity offices in London, ERA and REST both had offices in London. As Sarah Hughes of CA commented:

'We had weekly and daily contact with the people in the solidarity offices here, so we were building up very close links with the people here as well as with the people in the field. That added a whole different dimension and quality to the relationship. .. we probably lost that intensity when the war ended'¹³⁵

¹³² ERD.6, Paul Renshaw

¹³³ ERD.6, Paul Renshaw; ERD.9, Jenny Borden; & CA.5, Sarah Hughes

¹³⁴ ERD.6, Paul Renshaw

¹³⁵ CA.5, Sarah Hughes

That the experience of the cross-border operation was not institutionalised lies in the specificity of that experience, in particular the existence of effective indigenous partners at that time. Jenny Borden of CA commented:

'It is very hard to transfer lessons. You don't get exactly the same situation twice. ... ERA and REST were able to implement programmes in the field competently, if you don't have that end of the chain it makes the role of the northern agency much more difficult.'¹³⁶

In the 1980s, one of the major structural weaknesses that had historically constrained CA's capability, the existence of good partners and partnerships, was overcome in Eritrea and Tigray. CA was able to find a new strategic role, less by design and more by default.

CA's experience, through the cross-border operation, reflected the enhanced capability of the organisation in responding to relief in the 1980s. However this capability was ultimately determined not by the physical supply of goods or by the structural arrangement of a consortium, crucial as these were, but by the nature and ability of CA's indigenous partners, ERA and REST.¹³⁷ While the operation represented a conjuncture of events leading to an innovative and successful model of famine prevention, at the same time it exposed fundamental structural difficulties - in the north, the functions of international relations, donor funding and media representation; and in the south the dependency on effective partners - that continued to determine CA's capability.

¹³⁶ ERD.9, Jenny Borden

¹³⁷ For the importance of indigenous political structures for successful humanitarian intervention see the comparison of ERA and REST with the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army in Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, pp. 164-166; & a review of Operation Lifeline Sudan, a cross-border operation into Sudan, in Mark Duffield et al., *Operation Lifeline Sudan: a review*, (UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, July 1996)

Table 5.4 Emergency Relief Desk: Cash Donations 1981-91

ERITREA / TIGRAY / OROMO All figures in US \$ 1,000							
Donor	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985		TOTAL
Christian Aid	69	70	725	1,754	1,337		3,955
Danchurch Aid		134	400	286	1,058		1,878
Bread for the World	8	100	524	625	1,036		2,293
Dutch Interchurch Aid		144	145	323	505		1,117
Inter-Church Coordination Committee for Development Projects	33	84	233	164	466		980
Lutheran World Relief	47	50	1,157	1,474	938		3,666
Mennonite Central Committee					297		297
Norwegian Church Aid	594	265	931	931	944		3,665
Swedish Church Relief	1,480	425	617	1,547	221		4,290
Other	61		555	485	153		1,254
TOTAL	2,292	1,272	5,287	7,589	6,955		23,395
ERITREA / TIGRAY / OROMO All figures in US \$ 1,000							
Donor	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	TOTAL
Christian Aid	1,228	1,808	2,165	236	200	330	5,967
Canadian Lutheran World Relief				50	25	25	100
Church of Sweden Aid					300	400	700
Danchurch Aid	643	1,998	866	605	1,581	1,481	7,174
Bread for the World	1,323	1,565	1,888	500	820	522	6,618
Dutch Interchurch Aid	184	1,178	3,382	240	654	664	6,302
Finchurhaid					1,398	150	1,548
Inter-Church Coordination Committee for Development Projects	813	1,980	439	3,214	3,956	2,632	13,134
Lutheran World Relief	731	440	200	205	802	120	2,498
Mennonite Central Committee			200	100			300
Norwegian Church Aid	2,868	3,952	3,291	2,332	3,257	958	16,306
Swedish Church Relief	2,516	3,952	3,291	2,332	3,257	958	16,306
Other	173	5,387	2,504	10	125	141	8,340
TOTAL	10,479	22,441	17,364	10,589	17,478	10,295	88,646

Source: Norwegian Church Aid, Addis Ababa

Table 5.5 Emergency Relief Desk: Cash Donations Per Donor 1981-91

Cash Donation Per Donor 1981-91 All figures in US \$	
Christian Aid	9,922,000
Canadian Lutheran World Relief	100,000
Church of Sweden Aid	700,000
Danchurch Aid	9,052,000
Bread for the World	8,911,000
Dutch Interchurch Aid	7,419,000
Finchurcaid	1,548,000
Inter-Church Coordination Committee for Development Projects	14,014,000
Lutheran World Relief	6,164,000
Mennonite Central Committee	597,000
Norwegian Church Aid	23,424,000
Swedish Church Relief	20,596,000
Various non-ERD donors (others)	9,594,000
TOTAL CASH DONATIONS 1981-91	112,041,000

Source: Norwegian Church Aid, Addis Ababa

Table 5.6 Emergency Relief Desk: Food Donations 1981-91

TOTAL FOOD DELIVERIES All figures in metric tons				
YEAR	ERITREA	TIGRAY	OROMO	TOTAL
1981	4,662	162	0	4,824
1982	4,250	1,705	125	6,080
1983	12,589	4,636	217	17,442
1984	16,382	4,817	582	21,781
1985	55,944	16,900	190	73,034
1986	57,986	9,207	1,953	69,146
1987	26,124	8,646	2,320	37,090
1988	55,258	54,617	1,287	111,162
1989	28,515	24,478	2,541	55,534
1990	111,804	107,721	4,517	224,042
1991	40,699	21,317	2,450	64,466
TOTAL	414,213	254,206	16,182	684,601

Source: Norwegian Church Aid, Addis Ababa

Table 5.7 Emergency Relief Desk: Total Donations 1981-91

TOTAL VALUE OF DONATIONS All figures in US \$					
YEAR	CASH	FOOD	NON-FOOD	TRANSPORT	TOTAL
1981	2,292,000				2,292,000
1982	1,272,000				1,272,000
1983	5,287,000				5,287,000
1984	7,589,000	11,000,000	773,000		19,362,000
1985	6,955,000	27,454,806	777,487	4,011,854	39,199,147
1986	10,479,000	19,517,920	715,507	5,849,240	36,561,667
1987	22,441,000	5,852,532	2,398,566	9,962,086	40,654,184
1988	17,364,000	24,607,785	1,550,426	18,087,215	61,609,426
1989	10,589,000	19,804,119	3,118,246	6,172,502	39,683,867
1990	17,478,000	70,648,844	3,940,585	54,470,699	146,538,128
1991	10,295,000	22,163,744	2,158,202	17,499,389	52,116,335
Total	112,041,000	201,049,750	15,432,019	116,052,985	444,575,754

Source: Norwegian Church Aid, Addis Ababa

Chapter 6 CHRISTIAN AID AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA 1985-97

In the wake of the 1983-85 Ethiopian famine, a major policy concern for CA was how to move from relief to development. In the north, as highlighted in chapters 4 and 5, CA supported the relief-development policies of the Eritrean Relief Association and the Relief Society of Tigray. In the famine-affected areas of the south, it became involved in an ambitious programme of community-oriented rehabilitation and development. The programme, known as the Freedom From Hunger Campaign¹ (FFHC), was launched by the Ethiopian government and supported by a number of other northern aid agencies.² Over the following decade, this intervention became operational in 13 sub-project areas, with a target community of 174,858.³ This chapter explores CA's involvement in the FFHC programme and examines what it reveals about the organisation's capabilities in moving from relief to development in the 1990s.

The analysis follows two strategies. Firstly, it returns to the discussion of chapter 2 about the relevance of theories of development to CA. In important ways the FFHC programme reflected the general debates and preoccupations of the aid community at that time. Emerging from what has been called the 'new world disorder' of the early to mid-1980s, characterised by the resurgence of conflict-disasters such as Ethiopia, agencies like CA were concerned with how to make development work on a sustainable and significant scale and so prevent recurring disasters. Development theory offered 'alternative' concepts of accountability, participation, and empowerment, in which NGOs acted as facilitators of local development efforts rather than as operational service-deliverers. Central to the FFHC programme was the stated motive and accepted

¹ The Freedom From Hunger Campaign itself, as discussed in chapter 1, had been created in 1959 to provide support for the activities of NGOs in the area of rural development. The programme was particularly concerned with the long-term alleviation of poverty and priority from the start was given to the participation of local people and the long-term impact of the project as opposed to the merits of the project itself and its capacity to relieve immediate suffering.

² Other agencies involved in the programme were Band Aid Foundation (UK), Broederlijk Delen (Belgium), Comité Français Contre La Faim (France), DanChurchAid (Denmark), Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (F.R.G), Ford Foundation (USA) and Trocaire (Ireland)

³ Yoseph Negassa, *Project Progress Report 1994: FFHC/AD programme in Ethiopia*, (FFHC: Addis Ababa, February 1995)

claim that it would promote such an 'alternative development strategy'.⁴ FFHC aimed to put people at the centre of their own development; to empower the marginalised through institution building; to target the poor; to decentralise decision-making processes; and to work with central and local government structures in order to create sustainable and supportive institutional settings. This study looks at CA's experience of 'alternative development', through the FFHC programme.

Secondly, using Foucault's notion of power, the analysis explores the empirical evidence and looks at what actually happened. Exploring the links between the development discourse and the institutional practices that emerged, the analysis explores how power was elaborated. It suggests that despite the shifts in the institutional language of development employed by CA, through the FFHC programme, the set of power relations which underlay the development process reflected a greater degree of continuity and persistence. The objects of development in southern Ethiopia were all too readily seen as existing outside, rather than a products of, the tide of modern history; as victims rather than agents of change. This study explores the implications of this on CA's capabilities and the difficulties it faced in trying to define a new role for itself and escape from models of conventional development.

1. **'Alternative' Development: theory and practice**

The FFHC programme in southern Ethiopia was born out of an agreement between Ethiopia's Ministry of Agriculture and the FFHC programme of the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in 1985. The plan was to channel support from NGO donors to rural communities in 13 service cooperatives⁵ in the drought-prone south and south-west of Ethiopia. In the aftermath of the drought and famine of 1985, Western donors and NGOs wanted to move beyond crisis-management

⁴ See Korten's concept of third generation NGOs - 'the more fully the NGO embraces third generation programme strategies, the more it will find itself working in a catalytic, foundation-like role rather than an operational service-delivery role - directing its attention to facilitating development by other organizations, both public and private, of the capacities, linkages, and commitment required to address designated needs on a sustained basis.' Korten, 'Third generation NGO strategies', p. 149

⁵ Service cooperatives represented local administrative and economic structures and convenient points of entry to grassroots communities

to address the root causes of the problem. Based on a community-oriented, participatory methodology, FFHC aimed to meet this need by providing rehabilitation for drought-affected farming families in the short term, and by laying a basis for sustainable development in the long-term.⁶ FFHC represented the 'new professionalism'⁷ of the 1980s: at the core of its programme design and methodology lay notions of participation and the strengthening of the linkages between grassroots priorities and development policies.⁸ The shifts in development practice from technology-centered to people-centered have been briefly mentioned in chapter 2. Here, the evolution of development theory and the nature of the alternative participatory agenda pursued by CA, through the FFHC, is explored in more detail.

Development theory in the post-war era held that development was primarily a function of capital investment. In the 1950s, capital was directed to filling a 'technology gap' identified between the more and less developed countries; and in the 1960s to filling 'resource gaps', between government revenue and expenditure, between exports and imports, between savings and investments.⁹ By the end of the 1960s, concern at the lack of progress in altering the plight of the poor and at the failure to achieve 'take off' into self-sustained economic growth led to a revision of thinking and a shift away from production-centered strategies and methodologies to a more people-centered, basic-needs approach.¹⁰ As economists moved away from the previous doctrine that unequal income distribution promoted economic growth, more thought was given to appropriate technology, labour-using strategies, self-reliance, equitable growth and income distribution. Popular participation was identified as an essential organisational element of this basic-needs strategy. The emphasis in development theory shifted from the role of the central government and of non-local agents and began to emphasis the

⁶ The programme's aims are documented in Manzi Bakuramutsa & Dick Sandford, *Evaluation Report: NGO support for local agricultural rehabilitation initiatives* (FFHC: Addis Ababa, August 1988)

⁷ Chambers, *Rural Development*, pp. 168-188

⁸ A. G. Drabek, 'Development alternatives: the challenge for NGOs - an overview of the issues' *World Development*, 15 Supplement (1987), p. x

⁹ J. M. Cohen & N. T. Uphoff, 'Participation's place in rural development: seeking clarity through specificity' *World Development*, 8 (1980), p. 215

¹⁰ For ideas about 'take off' see W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: a non-communist manifesto* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1960); H. Chenery & A. Strout, 'Foreign assistance and economic development' *American Economic Review*, 56 (1966), pp. 679-733

importance of local organisation. An 'organisation gap' between central government agencies and the rural communities they were supposed to assist was identified and the importance of participatory local organizations as intermediaries recognised.¹¹ By 1974 the United Nation's Economic and Social Council was recommending that governments should 'adopt popular participation as a basic policy measure in national development strategy'.¹²

By the early 1980s, the participatory development paradigm was co-opted by political economist who placed the issue of state-society relations firmly at the centre of analysis.¹³ The central concept was that development should be people-centred. Priorities were no longer those projected by professionals but those perceived by the poor. The goal of development was 'no longer growth as defined by normal professions, but well-being and secure livelihoods as defined by the poor themselves.'¹⁴ Most importantly, people-centred development offered the prospect of sustainable development; decentralisation and empowerment would enable local people to exploit the diverse complexities of their own conditions. The rationale for the reorientation of development practice was seen to lie in the persistence of poverty, the lesson that rural elites had tended to capture the benefits of government programmes, the abundance of uneconomic showcase projects, the increasing dependence of southern countries on external resources and the stifling of local private initiative. One development analyst argued that:

'where such decentralized, self-organizing approaches to the management of development resources are seriously undertaken, they generally result in more efficient and productive resource management, a reduction in dependence on external resources, increased equity, increased local initiative and accountability and a strengthening of economic discipline.'¹⁵

The strategy was supported by a new professionalism which reversed the 'values, roles and power relations of normal professionalism' and put 'people first and

¹¹ Esman & Uphoff, *Local Organisations*

¹² Commission for Social Development, Report of the 24th Session, January 1975, (Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 58th Session, Suppl. No. 3, UN Document No. E/CN. 5/535), para 4. cited in Cohen & Uphoff, 'Participation's place in rural development', p. 213

¹³ Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress*

¹⁴ Chambers, *Challenging the Professions*, p. 10

¹⁵ Korten, 'Third generation NGO strategies', p. 146

poor people first of all.’¹⁶ New professionalism offered more than just an alternative value system, it offered a variety of alternative technologies, organizational forms, management and research methods appropriate to a people-centred development. As a key theorist commented: ‘the “last-first” paradigm includes learning from the poor, decentralization, empowerment, local initiative, and diversity.’¹⁷ A blueprint approach to development, well-suited to the production-centred development of the past was rejected in favour of a learning process approach, more suited to people-centred development with its flexible and changing definitions of roles, obligations, procedures and methods.¹⁸ The central leadership role was to be assumed by organisations with experience in grass-roots development and with the potential to serve as catalysts of institutional and policy change. The decade of NGOs had arrived. As Korten argued:

‘a number of NGOs have a natural interest in micro-policy reforms supportive of people-centred development, view development as primarily a people-to-people process, and lack the inherent structural constraints faced by the large donors.’¹⁹

Much was written about the suitability of the NGO sector in pluralising and strengthening civil society and so contributing to the ‘democratisation’ of African countries, an important ideological side-line to the new development paradigm.²⁰ The role of NGOs was recast as an enabling one, facilitating the creation of sustainable systems at the local, regional and national level. Such a role extended to the international level through advocacy and lobby.

Under the force of theoretical ‘orthodoxy’, popular participation had become a cliché by the end of the 1980s that was difficult for Western donors and NGOs to ignore. What was easier to ignore perhaps was the continuity of structures and relationships that lay behind it. This takes us back to the issues, discussed in chapter 2, about how development has worked in practice; to the institutional setting. Hirschman

¹⁶ Chambers, *Challenging The Professions*

¹⁷ Chambers, *Challenging The Professions*, p. 1

¹⁸ D. C. Korten & R. Klauss (eds.), *People-Centred Development* (Kumarian Press: West Hartford, Connecticut, 1984)

¹⁹ Korten, ‘Third generation NGO strategies’, p. 154

²⁰ Alan Fowler, ‘The role of NGOs in changing state-society relations: perspectives from eastern and southern Africa’ *Development Policy Review*, 9 (1991), pp. 53-83; Bratton, ‘The politics of government-NGO relations’, pp. 569-587

was among the first to argue that effective development policies and programmes - ones that mobilise funds - rest on a set of more or less unproven, simplifying and optimistic assumptions about the problem to be addressed and the approach to be taken.²¹ More recently, Roe observed that such optimistic 'enabling assumptions' are encoded in 'development narratives.'²² A narrative is a story, with a 'beginning, middle and end'. As such, narratives tell scenarios about what will happen according to their tellers if the events or interventions are or are not carried out as described. Development narratives are programmatic, they have a cohesive story-line and as such are difficult to rewrite. Development is thus constructed as a phenomena that is 'do-able' and 'programmable' according to the application of a range of technologies. Development, like disaster relief, is characterised by its own science, the content of which need not necessarily relate to the specific context in which it occurs. Its legitimacy derives from its own rationality and narrative.

In line with such arguments, recent case study research in Africa has shown how the driving force behind much development policy has been a set of powerful and widely perceived images of historical and geographical change.²³ These images and interpretations are often deeply misleading yet have proved both persistent and powerful. The result has been a de-contextualisation of development and the creation of a 'development apparatus' that is seen to systematically translate the ills and ailments of less developed countries into,

'technical problems such as isolation, lack of markets, lack of credit, unfamiliarity with a cash economy, lack of education, lack of fertilizer, lack of tractor, lack of purebred livestock, lack of farmers' associations and cooperatives, and lack of appropriate energy technology.'²⁴

Thus development interventions become institutionalised, reflecting a tendency 'to be mixed and matched out of a given set of available choices'²⁵, and legitimised by their own imperious rationality.

²¹ A. O. Hirschman, *Development Projects Observed* (Brookings Institution: Washington DC, 1968)

²² Emery Roe, 'Development narratives or making the best of blueprint development' *World Development*, 19 (1991), pp. 287-300

²³ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*; & collection of essays in Leach & Mearns (eds.), *The Lie of The Land*

²⁴ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, p. 87

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 259

It has been discussed above how discourses, in the sense meant by Foucault, are distinct orders of reality embodying real relations of power. Embedded in particular institutional structures and material relationships, development discourse has origins, objects, purposes, consequences and agents. Thus, 'to comprehend the real power of development we cannot ignore either the immediate institutional or the broader historical and geographical context within which its texts are produced.'²⁶ There are major problems with taking the participatory development discourse at face value. Aid agencies, such as CA, which support local organisations and ideas of participation and empowerment, cannot avoid imposing their own views of development, their own priorities, and their own bureaucratic requirements on the recipient. Northern aid agencies carry their own societal and institutional baggage and in order to understand, how they 'do' development, these influences need to be taken on board along with the mission statements and genuine intentions.

Further, the new agenda in the 1980s, for empowering civil society and participation, was in important ways influenced by and driven by ideology. In the 1980s, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, state organisations were widely seen by the major bilateral and multilateral donors as overgrown, inefficient, corrupt and costly. In line with neo-liberal ideology, state organisations were to be slimmed and an efficient, competitive private sector promoted. Consequently, official bilateral aid agencies and multilateral lending institutions made assistance conditional upon the host government's acceptance of structural adjustment packages. Such packages contained requirements for reduced economic intervention by governments and for the allocation of resources by market forces. Even among those, typically NGOs like CA, who opposed structural adjustment for its lack of concern for the poor, there was a degree of acceptance that government should do less. The preoccupations of the 1980s were arguably less about a new-found understanding of civil society's role in making development work and more to do with finding cheaper and more efficient alternatives to faltering governmental delivery systems. Ideology was not a stranger to development. In the

²⁶ Jonathan Crush, 'Introduction: imagining development' in Jonathan Crush (ed.), *Power of Development* (Routledge: London, 1995), p. 6

1960s, development was to be achieved through national planning and state intervention and in the 1970s, redistribution with growth was advocated through a neo-Fabian extension of state organisations.²⁷ Ideologies about the state had always provided a framework for thought and action in development.

Escobar has argued that development may be seen as an apparatus 'that links forms of knowledge about the Third World with the deployment of forms of power and intervention, resulting in the mapping and production of Third World societies.'²⁸ In this perspective, development may be seen as the name for a complex set of institutions and initiatives encompassing multiple, and often contradictory, interests.²⁹ Planned interventions are not always what they appear and there are a complex set of cultural and institutional structures that determine the way in which development initiatives are actually produced and put into practice. The following section looks at whether CA's involvement in southern Ethiopia, through the FFHC, was what it appeared.

2. A New Storyline: reality or rhetoric?

The FFHC programme represented a new challenge for CA. Geographically, it enabled the organisation to work in the south of Ethiopia where CA lacked effective partners. Operationally, it enabled CA to work with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, through the Ethiopian government's civil service, with local farming communities and alongside other northern NGOs. Strategically, it was a programme founded on principles of participatory development and one committed to creating sustainable systems at the local, regional and national level. Compared to CA's traditional involvement through individual partners, the FFHC programme represented a new comprehensive and larger-scale strategy for achieving greater impact. This section looks at the 'new' development apparatus of the FFHC programme. In particular, it explores whether a reversal of the center-outwards, core-periphery views

²⁷ Chambers, *Challenging The Professions*, p. 106

²⁸ Arturo Escobar, 'Imagining a post-development era' in Jonathan Crush (ed.), *Power of Development* (Routledge: London, 1995), p. 213

²⁹ Judith Heyer, Pepe Roberts & Gavin Williams (eds.), *Rural Development in Tropical Africa* (Macmillan: Hampshire & London, 1981), p. 12

that had dominated the conventional 'planners' top-down approach to rural development was achieved. The framework for analysis will be a description of the aims and initiatives of the programme and an analysis of what happened when they were implemented. The approach is not an evaluation, nor is it exhaustive; rather the aim is to understand the development apparatus in its own right and to explore the relation between 'planning' and 'outcome', through a number of episodes.

2.1 *The plan*

Central to the FFHC programme was a commitment to participatory methodology: a bottom-up planning process with individual cooperatives in sub-project areas identifying, formulating and implementing activities for their own rehabilitation and development; and an emphasis on self-evaluation. The strategy was for the farmers themselves to analyse their situation, identify problems, propose solutions and evaluate the actions taken. This was considered a key element in adapting programme activities to the changing circumstances and needs of the concerned communities and in facilitating an active process of 'learning by doing' on the part of project staff, participating institutions and farmers.³⁰ Blueprint development with its emphasis on planning from the top was to be rejected and a learning process approach which started from below and accepted that projects were hypotheses and failure was part of a broader learning curve implemented.³¹

In reality, participatory planning was not what it seemed. A review of FFHC's project papers indicates that participation varied over the cycle of the project, with a tendency to be stronger when the project was up and running and weakest at the project design stage and when working out how to wind down the projects. From the outset, contradictions existed between the rhetoric about participation and the reality. The original FFHC consultancy report of 1985 argued for the establishment of a NGO-

³⁰ For a theoretical discussion of such strategies see articles by Korten and Friedmann in Korten & Klauss (eds.), *People-Centred Development*; Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress*, p. 65; Chambers, *Rural Development*, pp. 211-212

³¹ For a discussion of 'blueprint development' see Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress*; Chambers, *Rural Development*

Liaison Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture, responsible for communicating and disseminating the concept of participatory development among NGOs wishing to work with the Ministry. Technical teams from the Ministry were to assist the cooperatives in formulating project proposals. These would then go to Liaison Unit for evaluation and from there through the FFHC/FAO office to a suitable NGO for funding. The NGO would then assist the cooperative either directly or through the FFHC programme. In this respect, it was envisaged that the main demand for project funding would come from the cooperatives themselves, through the Ministry of Agriculture. As soon as the Liaison Unit was established it was approached by a number of aid agencies with proposals for large sectoral rural development projects. These neither originated from the cooperatives or from the Ministry of Agriculture field offices. As the 1988 evaluation report argued, 'it [the Liaison Unit] has become an institution which is helping to translate NGO funds into action programmes rather than translating farmers' needs into requests for funds.'³²

Throughout the history of the FFHC programme, project planning remained top-down and was more notable for its rigidity than its flexibility. The 1988 evaluation found that in the 'trial and demonstration' component of the programme, the 'demonstration' aspect was given precedence and that even the Amharic term used - serto masayat - only indicated the demonstration element. Indeed the evaluation noted that the 'relevance of the trial plots is not apparent to farmers. They do not feel involved and the work on these plots conflicts, predictably, with their own field work.'³³ The 1991 evaluation revealed that little had changed and that 'project planning was still too much with the staff of FFHC and not with the farmers.'³⁴ More serious attention needed to be given to the specific needs of each community, deriving from the local ecology and existing traditions and to the institutionalised involvement of that community before the rhetoric could be believed. As a senior CA staff member

³² Bakuramutsa & Sandford, *Evaluation Report*

³³ Paul Spray, memo to Doug/Rachel/Jenny/Clive (10 November 1988), (CAO.AF/ME.545)

³⁴ FFHC, *Evaluation and Planning Workshop: NGO support to local agricultural rehabilitation initiatives* (FFHC: Debre Zeit, Ethiopia, 31 May - 6 June, 1992)

commented: 'what is quite evident from dialogue with farmers is that they have little interest in the purposes of the trial plot and have had no involvement in its planning'³⁵

Certainly the similarity of the constituent components of sub-project proposals appeared to conflict with known variations in climate and local tradition and called into question whether blueprint development had indeed been replaced by participatory planning at the grassroots level. In one cooperative, at Tuka, a Band Aid evaluation revealed how field level reality was at odds with the 'stereotyped' credit scheme input:

'At Tuka service cooperative we were briefed by the development agent as to the progress of the project. In reply to questions concerning the poor repayment record of the service cooperative's revolving loan of oxen ... he replied the loans made to "stronger" farmers had mostly been repaid, whereas poor farmers had simply not earned enough income to effect the payments. Asked if there would have been a better way of operating the scheme ... "we think it would have been better if all the oxen had gone to stronger farmers in the first instance, then from their repayment we could have helped farmers without expecting cash repayment. You see, in Borena culture, we have a tradition of richer members helping the poorer." Was this done in expectation of repayment in due course? "No, not to the person who provided the gift. But when the recipient was able to do it, he had a Borena duty to help another poorer member of society.'³⁶

The evidence suggested that the FFHC programme increased in size, scope and influence through stereotyped 'input' packages, training and networking.³⁷ In line with this observation, site selection tended to depend on accessibility, crucial to the delivery of such conventional 'development'.³⁸ What remained elusive was more locally-driven planning and the flexibility of procedures and methods implicit in a learning process approach. Clearly 'planning' could not be taken at its word and FFHC's interventions were not always what they appeared to be. When an FFHC report can make reference to training farmers in the principle of a participatory approach, it becomes clear that despite the aim and indeed the on-going rhetoric, participation had in fact become an 'input' and not a process.³⁹

³⁵ Paul Spray, memo to Jenny Borden/Doug Souter (29 September 1988), (CAO.AF/ME.545)

³⁶ John James, *Report: field trip to FFHC sub project* (Band Aid: London, November 1990)

³⁷ For an analysis of NGO 'scaling-up' strategies see Edwards & Hulme (eds.), *Making a Difference*

³⁸ FFHC, *Evaluation and Planning Workshop*

³⁹ Bakuramutsa & Sandford, *Evaluation Report*

2.2 *The outcome*

This section looks at what the FFHC programme was, and the outcomes it did have. It suggests that in reality the programme adopted a conventional approach to development; that local processes were de-contextualised and technical solutions applied to problems even when they were not technical in nature. Further it suggests that in the absence of political engagement, power was elaborated in unintended ways.

One issue that emerged was how the complex dimensions of soil erosion were translated within FFHC programme documents into technical problems requiring standard development inputs: training; credit for fertiliser; nursery management; environmental education; and reforestation. The reality was certainly much more complicated, as indeed the evaluation missions of 1988 and 1991 were to discover. These missions found that while farmers tended not to express soil and water conservation as a priority for themselves or the community, at the same time they recognised that loss of trees and soil erosion made it difficult to reduce their vulnerability to drought. The explanation for this apparent contradiction did not lie in the irrational or uneducated attitude of farmers but was reflective of their very real political and economic situation. At a 1992 FFHC workshop it was reported that:

‘farmers were fully aware of many of the measures needed to protect their soil and vegetation but unless they knew that the land was theirs, they had little interest in investing time and energy in improvements which could be either undone or taken away from them.’⁴⁰

What the missions exposed was how FFHC’s conceptual apparatus translated visible ills into simple, technical problems instead of addressing the real issues; in this case structures of land ownership.

Similarly, with the reforestation component, a standardised ‘neutral’ approach was adopted. A 1988 FFHC evaluation pointed out that:

‘currently this project has not developed its thinking beyond the general assumption that “tree planting is a good thing”. It cannot be wrong that the project is investing money and effort in encouraging tree planting. It is wrong that it should be doing so without a clearer picture of what it aims to achieve.’⁴¹

⁴⁰ FFHC, *Evaluation and Planning Workshop*

⁴¹ Bakuramutsa & Sandford, *Evaluation Report*

This comment followed directly from a statement that the FFHC team must avoid the easy options afforded by a standard format and give 'more serious attention to the specific needs of each community driving from the local ecology and existing traditions.'⁴² A 1992 evaluation report similarly recognised the weakness of the technical approach of the programme's water component. This had failed to establish water committees and had subsequently experienced only varied success in terms of participation and continuation. Essentially, 'covering too wide an area, with insufficient resources, it has been unable to mobilise the local community to undertake community water development - except in a few areas.'⁴³ The failure to ensure community support and concentration on technology had profound implications for sustainability. Indeed the water project appeared to be driven more by a concern with quantity than quality. In answer to questioning as to why 2 out of 7 water points in one sub-project area were not functional, a local field worker remarked: 'there are plans to construct other water point for the other peasant associations [local administrative units] in this project area and because of that maintaining these ones is a secondary issue.'⁴⁴

Essentially the programme reflected a conventional relief and development interpretation of agricultural change. The focus was on the management and regulation of natural processes. In this respect, environmental degradation and resource depletion were constructed as 'natural' and technical problems; the solution as a matter of educating people and providing appropriate technology even to the point where the introduction and adoption of improved and appropriate technologies were seen as an impact in itself.⁴⁵ What was absent was an analysis of political processes. The result was that local realities and interpretations of development were marginalised. This was clearly seen in the programme's 'women' component where the interventions failed to address structural and political issues or to embrace the broader social problem. A senior staff member at CA remarked:

'despite the programme's stated aim of focusing on the role of women in the community economy, there is little evidence that ... the programme has built up

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ FFHC, *Evaluation and Planning Workshop*

⁴⁴ FFHC.6, Addis Belay

⁴⁵ Penny Jenden, letter to Dick Sandford (19 April 1991), (CA Working document)

a database of information on women in the local communities ... this is partly because participation has tended to be narrowly defined - using formal structures such as group meetings ... where they are reluctant to express opinions which differ from their men.'⁴⁶

Women's exclusion from membership or representation in cooperatives and local political associations acted as a serious constraint in facilitating their participation. The problems faced by women in development were often not technical in nature. FFHC's conceptual apparatus precluded against such an awareness and its structural apparatus only succeeded in initiating an unduly slow and cumbersome learning process by which alternative means of involving women were finally realised.⁴⁷

The evidence suggests that the FFHC programme was unable to deal with marginal groups, be they women, pastoralists or the poorest farmers despite the fact that empowerment, meaning empowering people for their own development had been a major goal.⁴⁸ A field trip by a Band Aid representative to a sub-project, in Tuka, in 1990 found that the FFHC programme had failed to provide support or legitimacy to the Borana vis-à-vis the government, or empower them to direct their own development. When the representative visited the area, he found great concern being expressed at both the regional and local (awraja) level over the deterioration of Borana rangelands due to the government's ban on burning. Burning the grass prior to the main rains of February/March had been a standard practice of the Borana until 1980 when it was banned as part of a nationwide policy to protect against forest fires. The effect of the ban on the Borana had been to accelerate the intrusion of thorny scrub which by 1990 had shaded out much of the grass; and a great increase in the tick population. This issue, directly affecting the livelihood of the target population of the sub-project, had not been a subject of FFHC reporting, and no offer had been made to bring pressure to bear on government policy.

⁴⁶ Beverley Jones, *FFHC: an agricultural programme in southern Ethiopia*, (CA: London, January 1992)

⁴⁷ Women's credit schemes have since been set up with good results, providing an alternative means of engaging with their needs and priorities.

⁴⁸ One of the major tenets of FAO's FFHC/AD programme was that it facilitated dialogue between governmental organisations, North/South NGOs and rural communities; that it helped 'to provide support and legitimacy to local groups vis-à-vis the governments of their countries'. Bakuramutsa & Sandford, *Evaluation Report*

Such a depoliticised, technocentric approach was also evident in the Weyito Valley sub-project. This area that had been voluntarily and spontaneously settled by a community from the Konso highlands because of drought. While previously used by segments of the Konso people for the seasonal grazing of their livestock, there had been traditional friction between the Konso and the Tsamai pastoralists who grazed their stock on the other side of the Weyito river which formed a boundary, and with the Borena pastoralists who came into the area, with or without agreement on occasion, with raiding and counter-raiding taking place. Friction over this area's resources while always apparent had thereby been exaggerated by the settlement. Yet the pattern of development initiated by FFHC in this area was neither sensitive nor sustainable given the broader political-economy. As one FFHC consultant argued:

'the project is isolated and not integrated into local development. All infrastructure was realized for the immigrant group - no effort made to involve neighbouring pastoralist populations. Training staff seem to side with the new settlers and maintain some prejudice against semi-nomadic populations probably because of ignorance of these societies. ... effort should be made to approach the pastoralist populations because they have their own specific problems which need to be addressed. And in this case a kind of dialogue would take place again between farmers and breeders of livestock just like in the past.'⁴⁹

A more general example of the FFHC programme's tendency to construct a particular kind of interpretation, typically apolitical, and to organise its interventions on the basis of this interpretation can be seen when one looks at the profile of development across the region as a whole. While the FFHC programme constructed a development discourse and geographical area within which it organised 'development' according to its own conceptual and structural apparatus; outside this area, 'development' was perceived and organised by other aid agency programmes completely differently:

'We [FFHC] have been singularly unsuccessful in promoting activities requiring sustained community effort i.e. in pond construction and maintenance. There is a Ministry of Agriculture soil conservation project in our midst providing food for work and many of our NGO neighbours do the same. At a meeting held in September with members of the cooperative, they expressed the wish for help with pond rehabilitation but at the same time made it clear that some incentive was expected. I think these discrepancies in the approach of different organisations has to be sorted out at a higher level.'⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Eugene Binama, *Report: monitoring FFHC/AD FAO programme in Ethiopia*, (FFHC: Addis Ababa, December 1990)

⁵⁰ W. J. Bradfield, 'End of tour report' (December 1990), (CAO.AF/ME.542)

As with its myopic approach to the conflicting interests in the Weyito Valley, on a broader scale, FFHC's failure to structure a concerted approach at provincial and regional level undermined prospects for sustainability

Quite different philosophies and procedures were pursued by different northern NGOs in the same geographical area with the same target groups. The FFHC programme essentially constructed its own object of analysis which in turn shaped its own interventions. In this respect, 'development' was not a neutral technique; it was a very real historical event, specific to its own immediate institutional context. This tendency for FFHC to generate its own discourse, typically apolitical was a fundamental characteristic of the programme. As seen above, it resulted in the programme's detachment from the actual socio-economic and political processes that underlay development. Development became a package implemented by outsiders and local needs and priorities were subordinated. Pursuing its neutral and technical rationale, the intervention not only bracketed out alternatives but more importantly produced concrete power effects. These can be most clearly seen in the programme's reliance on local political institutions and individuals.

The FFHC programme operated through a local government system of peasant associations and cooperatives which had historically been imposed by an unpopular central government. Peasant associations had been formed by the Derg in the mid-1970s as semi-official government entities at the lowest administrative level.⁵¹ They sent representatives to the cooperatives which acted as consumer cooperatives involved in the procurement and sale of consumer goods; agricultural marketing; and grain milling. The cooperatives in turn reported to the local departments of the various ministries at district and regional level.⁵² Formed by decree, cooperatives in Ethiopia were used primarily as mechanisms for government functions at the local level and as tools for general rural development efforts by government and donors alike. They were

⁵¹ In 1992, peasant associations numbered about 17,000 with an average membership of about 275 peasant families, and a total membership of some 6 million. Paul Ojermark, *Development of agricultural multi-purpose co-operative societies in Ethiopia* (FAO: Rome, March 1992)

⁵² The total number of service cooperatives established in Ethiopia is approximately 4000, with an estimated membership for all cooperatives at 4.8 million farmer households, thus an average of 1200 per cooperative. Ojermark, *Development of agricultural multi-purpose co-operative societies*

top-down institutions with upwards and not downwards accountability. Peasant association leadership was determined by Party appointment in almost all areas and in turn was largely responsible for determining cooperative leadership. As a result cooperative members became alienated from what should have been their own organisations and denied the right to influence even issues that were of direct concern to them, such as the marketing and pricing of their own products. A 1992 Food and Agriculture Organisation consultancy report concluded that:

‘the potential of genuine co-operatives to contribute to rural development based on popular participation was missed [during the time of the Derg] and the very concept of co-operatives fell into widespread disrepute.’⁵³

Despite this fact that a very real problem existed in the relationship between the cooperatives’ executive and the farmers, the FFHC programme, from its inception, relied heavily on the cooperatives’ leadership for planning and project implementation. At the start there were good reasons for choosing to collaborate with this level of community organisation - government recognition and official legal status. By the 1988 evaluation however, it was clear that weak communication between the cooperatives and individual farmers was seriously threatening the integrity of the programmes participatory methodology. A field visit by a CA staff member to Abela Farechew sub-project found that:

‘communications between the service cooperatives management and the farmer members appear to be almost non-existent ... We got the impression of an over confident cooperative management who do not bother too much with farmers’ opinions and of superficial monitoring by visiting staff relying too much on service cooperative-provided information.’⁵⁴

Further, the lack of participation was impacting on the performance of specific projects.

A senior CA staff member remarked about the oxen distribution scheme at Abela

Farechew that:

‘one got the impression that participation in the development planning involved only the cooperative at committee level and had not gone down to the farmers themselves... it was difficult to find farmers who knew either the price that they had paid for the oxen or the basis of their repayment calculation. Although mortality was quite high and discussions about insurance had been proceeding for some time, there was in fact no insurance provision in operation. Repayment

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Paul Spray, memo to Jenny Borden/Doug Souter (29 September 1988), (CAO.AF/ME.545)

was demanded and pressure was brought to bear on individuals irrespective of whether they were in a position to repay.⁵⁵

By ignoring the local historical and political realities, the possibility that the FFHC programme was in fact strengthening state presence in the local region can not be ignored. The programme's reliance on cooperatives for implementation opened it up to charges of supporting and reinforcing a form of community organisation that was essentially external and unpopular. In Borana areas, pastoralist organisations clearly would have had more legitimacy than cooperatives or other government bodies.⁵⁶ Indications that the FFHC programme did indeed witness an extension of bureaucratic state power may be found in the reaction of the cooperatives and the peasant associations following the move in 1995 to decentralise the programme's entry points. This move came after it was recognised by the programme that cooperatives were not the ideal tool for participatory development. Their role was recast as conduits of activities rather than as the focus, and efforts made to exploit more informal village-based organisations. The 1995 progress report noted that:

'although the idea of working through smaller groups was enthusiastically received by farmers, they are not so enthusiastically endorsed by the cooperatives, which fear that their resources and influence will be depleted.'⁵⁷

Similarly, the disruptive attitude of the Ministry of Agriculture towards the deployment of locally trained paravets as a decentralised alternative to their own employees, was indicative of the Ministry's desire to maintain control over resources and processes.⁵⁸ Such competition between grassroots workers and the official establishment belies any perception of development as a neutral process, devoid of political effect. A related problem concerned the programme's initial reliance on development agents who were attached to the cooperatives and were the main grassroots implementers of the programme and at the same time government officials. These individuals were neither neutral nor appropriate. Responsible for collecting taxes, seeing that conscription quotas were fulfilled and in some areas for rounding up workers for cotton picking in

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Ruth Segal, *Note: FFHC (CA: London, April 1996)*

⁵⁷ Yoseph Negassa, *Project Progress Report 1994*

⁵⁸ FFHC.1, Yoseph Negassa,

the Lower Awash Valley, development agents were often resented by local communities. Moreover, rarely from the local community, rarely speaking the local language and generally urban-educated, their commitment was in doubt and they often appeared to talk 'at' the people.⁵⁹

2.3 Discussion

Embedded within the FFHC's programme design was a picture not only of the target population but also a related conception of the programme's own nature. In essence, the official thinking that presided over the creation of the programme saw government and programme alike as neutral instruments of development, providing technical solutions and social services to an equally depoliticised and undifferentiated rural poor. As such, the political and structural causes of poverty were reduced to the level of individual motivation and attitude; and development became a matter of simply educating individual people.

Despite the rhetoric, FFHC systematically translated problems into technical ones requiring apolitical, technical and 'development' intervention. In this respect, the 'problem' of Ethiopia's periodic famines was identified as environmental degradation due to population increase, poverty and poor farming practices.⁶⁰ And the logical 'solution' was for the provision of agricultural inputs; development of irrigation schemes; reversal of environmental degradation through reforestation and soil and water conservation; and training and educating farmers.⁶¹ What became revealed in the process was a tendency to abstract the problems, to ignore the historical and political-economy and to see agricultural rehabilitation as the sole determinant in breaking the cycle of drought and famine. As a result, there was an equally clear tendency for the programme components to come as standardised packages, typically providing technical solutions even to problems even when these were not technical in nature. 'Participation', the guiding principle was invoked as a technique, an educating tool, to

⁵⁹ Beverley Jones, inter-office memo (5 July 1991), (CAO.AF/ME.542)

⁶⁰ 'The project is operating in a food crisis situation in which means must be found to feed an increasing population from deteriorating land' Bakuramutsa & Sandford, *Evaluation Report*

⁶¹ *ibid.*

reach fixed goals determined by outsiders. As such, it became just that, a technique; an 'input' rather than a result; a methodology rather than 'the institutionalised involvement that contributes to long-term sustainability.'⁶²

Why did the FFHC programme lose its way and become captured by a more conventional development discourse? To begin with the language of participation failed to address the limitations imposed on the development process by the non-discursive culture of donor agencies, their funding and reporting requirements. In this perspective, the programme's ability to promote participatory planning and adapt to field level realities was belied by conflicting structural origins and purposes. An indication of such contradictions is given in the following comment by Beverley Jones of CA:

'given the pressure of time to move directly into implementation ... [this water engineer] felt that it would have been useful to have a greater understanding of the range of cultural differences between the various target communities. While they occupied one region, there were significant differences in their agricultural and pastoral methods (e.g. the Boran land-burning), their organisational structures and their attitudes which affected the appropriateness of the methodology and the transferability of models which had worked in one area to another. This suggests that more time is needed to evaluate models and the contexts in which they might be replicated.'⁶³

Participatory planning and a 'learning process approach' take time, require high staffing levels and good management. It costs. Yet the reality was that resources moved between Western government donors and NGOs, like CA, when quick quantifiable results were demonstrated. Money needed for the sort of feasibility analysis and project evaluation that would include real participation, despite the rhetoric on both side of the donor-NGO equation, would simply not have been available; and the managers of FFHC knew this. In contrast, NGOs like CA can mobilise funds for selling standardised packages. FFHC's programme planning and reporting reflected the quantitative nature of analysis both of problems and of solutions. We have seen how with the water component, quantity was prioritised over quality; a reflection of donor reporting and funding requirements. Moreover, where financial and technological investment at the local, basic-needs level was suitable, the FFHC programme performed relatively well: veterinary and human health inputs benefited rural

⁶² Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar*, p. 225

⁶³ Beverley Jones, inter-office memo (5 July 1991), (CAO.AF/ME.542)

communities; grinding mills provided to cooperatives made a qualitative difference to the lives of women and provided a good source of income for the cooperative; and some farmers benefited from agricultural and oxen credit, although this tended to be the richer members of the community.

Yet it was not just structural factors that made the FFHC programme what it eventually was. Weak theorising, particularly on civil society was also crucial. This can be seen with regard to the programme's interpretation of and dependence on cooperatives. Realistically, it would have been difficult to find alternative community structures to support in the mid-1980s. But there was another imperative. Cooperatives provided grassroots local organisations central to a strategy of institution-building and empowering civil society. They represented pluralism and as such were good. Yet what has been highlighted in the analysis above is that 'civil society' discourse - a central one to the new 'orthodoxy' of alternative development - needed to be thought about more carefully. The FFHC's programme design reflected an apolitical analysis of civil society. In effect, civil society was 'good' regardless of its context. The fact that the context was highly political indicates that the approach was flawed and even harmful.

The FFHC programme was not what it appeared. Arguably, it fitted more comfortably with the conventional production-orientated, technical, top-down approach than with any 'alternative' approach. In reality, growth in the sense of an 'additive' strategy that focused on a package of standard technical inputs was pursued; consciences were lulled by the rhetoric of participation; and the thornier issues of the pastoral dimension, of land ownership and of political processes left unattended. The following section looks at the role played by CA within the programme, at what CA felt about its results, and at what the programme reveals about CA's evolving capabilities.

3. Christian Aid and the Freedom From Hunger Campaign Programme in southern Ethiopia 1985-97

CA's involvement in the programme began from its inception in the form of funding although perhaps its most significant and direct involvement occurred between 1988 and 1991 when CA appointed and sponsored a water engineer to oversee the

water development component. There were many reasons why the decision to support the FFHC programme was taken. As a neutral non-government agency, it provided CA with a useful channel for aid during the highly politicised and sensitive years of the Derg; it enabled CA to find a way of working with a difficult government.⁶⁴ It also enabled CA to become involved in the south of Ethiopia where a dearth of potential partners and concern over the imbalance of its assistance, the majority of which was going to the northern non-government-held areas as opposed to the government-held areas, were providing strong institutional and moral imperatives for action. To a greater extent, the programme also appeared to tie in with CA's corporate priorities during a time of self-analysis in the mid-1980s: it offered the prospect of a decentralised approach to agricultural rehabilitation; one committed to credit-based initiatives rather than hand-outs, countering arguments that aid produced dependency and disempowered the recipient; one that addressed the long-term, underlying cause of famine, that looked at the relationship between society and environmental change rather than merely alleviating its symptoms; one that sought to work with government and local authorities; and one that focused on the poor and marginalised, particularly women. In essence it offered the prospect of a move from emergency relief to agricultural rehabilitation, a major priority for the organisation as it emerged from the famine of 1983-85.

Increasingly over the years however and perhaps especially between 1988 and 1990 when it had direct personal contact through the water engineer, Bill Bradfield, CA experienced problems with the programme. A recurring issue was the quality of monitoring, evaluation and feed back. It was generally felt that the programme's reporting had a number of failings: line management between the FAO/FFHC Rome office, the Addis office and the field office in southern Ethiopia was complicated; CA staff had little direct contact with the field staff; all reports and accounts were processed in Rome, so that informal communication and rapid response both ways was rarely possible; and the nature of analysis was weak:

'it is felt that some of the reporting received through Rome does not always acknowledge the full extent of the problems that FFHC faces and that this

⁶⁴ See chapters 4 & 5 above

detracts from the quality of the relationship between donors, FAO and FFHC.⁶⁵

Relevant CA staff found it difficult to work with the unwieldy bureaucracy of the programme's management. Some specifically felt that 'many of the problems have been as the result of management issues relating to FAO Rome'⁶⁶ With all funding and reporting channeled through the FAO and no formal mechanism for direct communication with the field staff, concerns were expressed by CA staff members about issues of accountability. In particular, some felt that opportunities for developing and empowering local organisations through flexible and responsive partnership was being missed.⁶⁷ It was for this reason that senior members of staff were keen to see FFHC develop as an independent Ethiopian NGO with the capacity to react quickly to changes on the ground and to be directly accountable to the donor agencies. This process was finally initiated in 1995, to become operational during 1997.

Yet, some senior CA staff also recognised a more fundamental problem less to do with the overt institutional structure of the programme and more to do with its hidden origins, objects and purposes. In essence, doubts about the programme's rhetoric of participation began to emerge. Certainly during the 1991 evaluation mission, some began to question the achievements of the programme and its relevance to the fundamental issues underlying progress towards sustainable food production: whether only lip-service was being paid to the issue of participation; whether a bridge between 'relief' and 'reconstruction' had been crossed or whether vulnerability was still a major issue; whether an understanding of what was important for the success of reducing vulnerability and what was simply cosmetic had indeed been achieved.⁶⁸ Some felt that the programme had lost its way: its participatory methodology was weak; analysis had been poor and overly quantitative; reporting had been fairly abstract and often

⁶⁵ Dan Collison, letter to Nora McKeon (24 January 1994), (CA Working Document)

⁶⁶ Dan Collison, *Report: FFHC project staff, Ministry of Agriculture and donors meeting*, (CA: London, June 1992)

⁶⁷ FFHC.7, Beverley Jones

⁶⁸ CA, 'FFHC Questionnaire for funders' (1991), (CAO.AF/ME.589)

unreliable; the approach had been too general; and a clear picture of what had been and what was going to happen in the localities was absent.⁶⁹

Individual's unease with the programme's rhetoric may be seen in a number of examples. Certainly in the programme's scaling-up strategy, some CA staff felt that participatory methodology had been sacrificed and that the programme had expanded too fast. While FFHC sought to plan projects and replicate them within a year or two, senior CA staff advocated a slower approach steering away from the danger of compromising the quality of impact. The fear was that if FFHC spread itself too thinly, it would be difficult to implement a staff-intensive participatory methodology and the programme would become inclined to operate a 'package-approach.'⁷⁰ Similarly, some felt that the programme relied too heavily on seconded 'experts'. In its desire to demonstrate quick results, the programme had come to rely on over-centralised management rather than investing time and energy into generating community participation. With the water development component, this state of affairs aroused particular fears. It was felt that in the face of uncertain central funding and the absence of community financial responsibility, the short-term benefits of such a programme were simply not sustainable. As Bill Bradfield, the CA-sponsored water engineer wrote:

'because it was not built into the FAO proposals, it was very difficult to build up an effective core of local staff to implement water technology in different regions. This had implications for sustainability once the water engineer withdrew.'⁷¹

Similar problems occurred with the health component, where an over-reliance on seconded staff from the Ministry of Health created a crisis situation in 1996 when staff were withdrawn by the government, following a major restructuring of the Ministry.⁷²

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ 'Penny Jenden reiterated Band Aid's feeling that FFHC/AD should be more dynamic in seeking additional sources of funding ... there may, however, be some contradiction between Band Aid's desire to see substantial amounts of funds raised and CA's preference for a more selective approach, based on the quality of donor commitment and the need to expand the programme without compromising the quality of its impact.' Nora McKeon, 'Report on duty travel to London' (22-23 June 1988), (CAO.AF/ME.545)

⁷¹ Beverley Jones, inter-office memo (5 July 1991), (CAO.AF/ME.542)

⁷² FFHC.1, Yoseph Negassa

By the early 1990s, senior CA staff clearly felt that FFHC was operating a standardised 'package-approach'; that project staff and cooperative communities had too readily accepted the rhetoric of a participatory narrative; and that participation needed to be a fuller, more reciprocal dialogue, using different techniques to involve people.⁷³

Beverley Jones forcefully argued:

'despite being established with the intention of being a bottom-up participatory model of agricultural rehabilitation and development, FFHC has fallen into many of the bureaucratic traps which beleaguer projects with such complex multi-disciplinary webs of participation and responsibility. It might not be too harsh to say that it has become a top-down programme which elicits support by describing itself as bottom-up.'⁷⁴

In many ways, FFHC did not turn out to be the programme its advocates in CA had wished to support.⁷⁵ What does this reveal about CA and how its role in development was determined and constructed?

What is particularly interesting is how CA seemed to accept a neo-malthusian environmental degradation narrative for southern Ethiopia - in FFHC's programme documents, labels such as 'food crisis situation', 'increasing population', 'deteriorating land' and 'poor natural resource use' were adopted as technical phenomena; their causal interrelations assumed - when such a narrative was in direct opposition to its analysis of the situation in the north. Here, in Tigray and Eritrea, CA was involved in a highly political relief and development intervention; and one, moreover, which identified the causes of famine as lying in the political-economy and not the environment. This contradiction can be explained by the links between the discursive and the non-discursive; by the relationship between the words and the institutional expression of development. Essentially it was the different origins, purposes and structures in northern Ethiopia as compared to southern Ethiopia that ensured that while the intentions of development may have been the same, the outcome was very different. The complex relation between the 'intentionality of planning and the strategic intelligibility of outcomes'⁷⁶; the fact that development interventions are not simply the

⁷³ Beverley Jones, 'The FFHC agricultural programme in southern Ethiopia', p. 79

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 79

⁷⁵ CA.5, Sarah Hughes

⁷⁶ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, p. 20

expression of objective interests but are social institutions with real functions is perhaps most clearly seen in this dichotomy between CA's interpretation in the north and south of Ethiopia. CA did not operate in a political void, where intentions could be simply translated into outcomes. Different situations demanded different ways of operationalising intentions. CA's initial and continued support of FFHC was essentially a reflection of the agency's characteristic pragmatism. As a balance to its involvement in the cross-border operation and a 'way of not demonising everything to do with the Derg'⁷⁷, it reflected the awareness of senior staff within CA that there were different ways of looking at things and different levels of involvement. While this may be interpreted as 'sitting on the fence', it was a policy that had important effects in the long-term. As Beverley Jones explained:

'the agencies who didn't work on both sides had much more of a problem in re-adjusting to the new Ethiopia in 1991 because they had no credibility in other parts of Ethiopia - they were seen as the hacks of Tigray and Eritrea whereas CA was credible with the church, with the Ministry of Agriculture, and I'm sure it helped our transition to the new regime.'⁷⁸

Structurally dependent on the effectiveness of its partners in the south, CA's ability to fulfill its intentions were ultimately determined by the situation on the ground. A comparison of CA's intervention in southern Ethiopia, through the FFHC programme, with its intervention in northern Ethiopia, through the cross-border operation, reveals this.

4. Understanding Development: lessons for Christian Aid

The FFHC development programme in southern Ethiopia promoted, licensed and justified certain interventions and practices, delegitimising and excluding others. A storyline was created, with its own interpretation and stabilized assumptions about the problems and the solutions to be addressed. The analysis has shown how this storyline was dictated by a 'development' representation of southern Ethiopia in that it was determined largely by what the FFHC programme could or couldn't do. In essence, FFHC could supply technical inputs and so the experiences of the target population

⁷⁷ FFHC.7, Beverley Jones

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

were represented largely outside their specific historical and geographical context. Development became a task of education, the introduction of changes in 'traditional' attitude. While the 'centre-outwards', 'core-periphery' language of development may have been reversed, the structures that underpinned the development process were left unchallenged and the last were not put first.⁷⁹ The FFHC programme was not an isolated example. In general, aid agencies, find it hard to escape from conventional models of development even when the rhetoric implies that they have done so. Clearly there are hidden structural purposes that need to be addressed. Despite the rhetoric of the 'new professionalism', it would appear that 'the inertia of the normal has been shifted but little.'⁸⁰

The reasons for this 'inertia' lie at many levels. On a very human level, it is conceptually easier for development professionals to 'think in linear terms,' despite the fact that field-level realities - whether ecosystems, farming systems, or livelihood strategies - are 'non-linear, adaptive and differentiating.'⁸¹ Equally, on a broader policy level, there will always be a tendency for national policy-makers, aid agencies and academics to adopt a 'set of concerns for dialogue and debate, for securing and legitimating flows of funds, and as a framework for thought and action.'⁸² These concerns - women in development, participation, institution-building etc. - are very functional, they 'move money', and as such there is a clear tendency for simplification and standardisation. In the process, the real and more complex issues underlying the problem of women's development or grassroots participation, the issues that aid agencies are less capable of addressing, are obscured. At an institutional level, a clear imperative to translate the political realities of poverty and powerlessness and the economic realities of complex livelihoods into technical problems awaiting solution by 'development' agencies and experts becomes blatant. As one analyst has argued:

'the more uncertain things seem at the micro-level, the greater the tendency to see the scale of uncertainty at the macro-level to be so enormous as to require

⁷⁹ Chambers, *Rural Development*

⁸⁰ Chambers, *Challenging the Professions*, p. 14

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 13

⁸² Robert Chambers, *The State and Rural Development: ideologies and an agenda for the 1990s* Institute of Development Studies Discussion Paper No. 269 (Institute of Development Studies, November 1989), p. 1

broad explanatory narratives that can be operationalised into standard approaches with widespread application.'⁸³

A prime institutional need of development agencies is to 'move money'; to spend the money they have been charged with spending, and to put their resources into action.⁸⁴ Their organisational need is to find the right kind of problem; the kind of 'problem' that requires the 'solution' they are there to provide. In this perspective, the tendency is to veer away from the political and structural problem and to plug into the technical and geographical one.

The rhetoric of much of the 'alternative development' paradigm is not simply due to the mystification of ideology.⁸⁵ The language employed in development is not simply a misrepresentation of what the development apparatus is really up to. Words may indeed put up a smokescreen but this is not always intentional. Rather it is because discourse has concealed structures, embodying material, political and indeed ideological relationships, that development often becomes something other than intended. This is not to excuse responsibility, rather to draw attention to the fact that in order to understand why and how agencies such as CA are drawn into homogenized conventional models of development so frequently, despite aspirations otherwise, one must look at the institutional context within which 'development' discourse is located. It is here that one can see how intentional plans interact with unacknowledged structures and purposes to produce unintended results. And it is here that the challenge of finding new forms of engagement with the questions of poverty, hunger and oppression must begin.

CA's experience in development in southern Ethiopia, through the FFHC programme, exposed the limits to the organisation's capabilities. In confronting the challenge of development it was often more convenient to promote particular, off-the-shelf intervention 'packages' which framed problems and solutions in technical terms

⁸³ Roe, 'Development narratives', p. 288

⁸⁴ J. Tandler, *Inside Foreign Aid* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1975) cited in Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, p. 70

⁸⁵ For an elaboration of this point see Gavin Williams, 'The world bank and the peasant problem' in Heyer, Roberts & Williams (eds.), *Rural Development in Tropical Africa*, pp. 37-42; & Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, pp. 17-21

and obscured alternative analyses such as those which lay in the realm of political economy. Empirical evidence suggests that the programme became a standardized intervention package for rural development, more representative of simplifying interpretations of agricultural change than of field-level geography or history. The rhetoric of participation was too easily accepted; its meaningfulness belied by the reality of top-down programming and implementation.

Despite the apparent change in the 'fashion-conscious institutional language of development'⁸⁶ since the 1960s, the underlying metaphors of development employed by agencies like CA have proved persistent. The above analysis has implied that development structures are multi-layered and often contradictory; and that planning cannot be taken at its word. For CA, the FFHC programme reflected key problems with development work, both generally and in the specific policy environment of southern Ethiopia. Most importantly, this analysis has questioned whether CA, and NGOs in general, are institutionally equipped to respond to current challenges for 'alternative development'.

⁸⁶ Doug Porter, 'Scenes from childhood: the homesickness of development discourses' in Crush (ed.), *Power of Development*, p. 64

Conclusion

LESSONS: THE PAST HISTORIC AND THE FUTURE IMPERFECT

Adopting a historical time-frame, this thesis has explored the evolving capabilities of CA as a charity in Ethiopia over 30 years. What is most striking is how CA has continued to lose its way down the same paths. Two issues in particular have emerged in explanation of this. The first is that CA has had difficulties finding a voice, a clear theoretical strategy and agenda for action. The second, is that CA has had difficulties operationalising intentions. The following draws together the main findings of the thesis. The first section explores why these difficulties have arisen. The second section looks towards the future and asks what policy prescriptions can be drawn from CA's history.

1. Christian Aid and lessons from the past

This study has highlighted a number of key influences and structures that have impacted on CA's performance in Ethiopia. Each of these has touched upon the multi-layered and often contradictory nature of the organisation, on how different voices exist at different levels and on how theory has related to practice. They are drawn together below under four headings.

The persistence of conventional interpretations of famine, relief and development:

Chapter 2 put forward the argument that the driving force behind much development and emergency policy in Africa has been a set of powerful interpretations and widely perceived images of change. The idea of famine as a 'disaster event' has been particularly persistent, as have images of soil erosion and an essentially undynamic view of peasant behaviour. Commonly represented in the form of a narrative, such interpretations have made stabilizing assumptions about the problem to be addressed and the approach to be taken. Such assumptions have thus substituted for the rich diversity of people's historical and political interactions with particular environments. They have constituted 'discourse', in the sense meant by Foucault to draw attention to the way in which they have embodied relations of power that were

constituted through acts that went unnoticed because they were taken for granted. The fact that discourse was embedded in particular institutional structures has not only accounted for its tenacity, but has enabled it to have practical consequences, or power effects that reveal the underlying exercise of power.

The thesis has shown that in CA's development interventions in Ethiopia in the 1980s/1990s and emergency interventions in the 1970s, policy was driven by an interpretation that had more to do with the specific cultural policy paradigm of 'outsiders' and little to do with the specific historical and socio-political context of those who were actually suffering, the 'insiders'. Theoretically, structurally and strategically, it was more convenient for CA to promote particular, off-the-shelf intervention 'packages' which framed problems and solutions in technical terms, and obscured those which lay in the realm of political economy. Such de-contextualisation had profound implications for the validity of CA's humanitarian undertaking and explained why the organisation had difficulties operationalising intentions in northern Ethiopia in the 1970s and in southern Ethiopia in the 1990s.

Fund-raising, development education and the media:

CA's activities have relied on fund-raising from the general public. The organisation's fund-raising has therefore had to appeal to and elicit a response from a wide audience. This has often served to reinforce stereotyped images and interpretations which, in CA's development education mode, the organisation has wished to challenge. For example, the northern popular perception of famine as evidence of a malthusian crisis in Africa with an environmental dimension played an important role in sustaining aid flows to Ethiopia in the mid-1980s, but arguably did little to further understanding among the general public in the north of the social and political realities in the south. In fund-raising, a number of factors have acted to reinforce stereotyped images. Firstly, the motivation to give has been largely driven by emotion, guilt and horror. In 1968, CA's publicist noted: 'the vast majority of people ... give emotionally rather than intellectually.'¹ Such emotions were best triggered by images of 'victims' and

¹ Hugh Samson, memo to Alan Brash (12 July 1968), (SOAS.CA/I/15.2)

'disasters'. Secondly, fund-raising operated in a competitive field. In 1968, again, it was recognised within CA that:

'in communication terms we must not delude ourselves in believing that because we are a charity we have a divine right to be read. We have to compete on a commercial basis with other advertisers in the same issue of the newspaper and with many other demands made on peoples' thinking time.'²

Thirdly, there was a public expectation that fund-raising should correspond with what the agency was seen to be concretely doing. Fund-raising thus became tied to raising money for specific and definable projects. All the above posed problems for development education. The first two points related to the content of fund-raising appeals, the impact on development education was consequential. The third point was more about CA's mission, about whether it should have simplified its operations by concentrating on its particular job of raising money for projects or whether it should have acted as an educational instrument for the wider field of relations of rich nations to the poor nations, and the whole problem of international economic and political justice. As CA's publicist argued in 1975, it was a question of whether 'CA should relinquish its role of leading public opinion and conform to the lowest common denominator in its constituency's understanding of Third World need and CA's response to it.'³

The tension between fund-raising and development education was about finding a voice and defining a strategy but also about structure and how to operationalise intentions. CA had two constituencies, those who gave money in the north and those who received it, in the south. In such a situation, accountability was hazardous. While CA did resolve to move forward as an educational and campaigning agency, the basic tension and internal ambivalence between its need to raise funds within the domestic context, and the need to maintain an institutional ethos appropriate to the organisation's southern clientele remained. It was a tension that went to the root of what CA was, did, and was ultimately capable of achieving. In Ethiopia in the 1970s stereotyped images and interpretations of change were more reflective of CA as a fund-raising organisation than as one committed to its southern clientele. In the 1980s famine, CA was more

² P. Mead, letter to P. Watts (21 August 1968), (SOAS.CA/I/15.2)

³ Hugh Samson, letter to George Sinclair (25 March 1975), (CAO.DIR.A)

sensitive to the needs of its partners in the south and yet its performance remained tied by the wider fund-raising profile of other agencies and donors in the north. This reduced its ability to effectively pursue advocacy and education. In the 1980s and 1990s, fund-raising for the Freedom From Hunger Campaign programme remained tied to a conventional development narrative, reflecting what was 'do-able' rather than what was 'possible'.

The tension between defining strategy and operationalising that strategy was further exacerbated by the character of relief and development coverage in the mass media. This could distort images both of CA and of the Third World, and most importantly of 'relief' and 'development'. It was recognised early on that CA's image as an organisation was not totally of its own making. In the 1970s, CA's publicist remarked:

'despite a substantial output of controlled publicity, many supporters (and all potential supporters) are still influenced more by what they learn of CA from independent and uncontrolled sources - newspapers, TV and radio - not solely because of their superior coverage but also because the public accepts "impartial" reportage more readily than what an organisation prints about itself. Hence the importance of good media relations work, ... although ... the selection and presentation of what is actually published is out of one's control.'⁴

This distortion created problems of credibility: 'one result of this is that when less publicised activities come to light, they may strike some people as being at variance with what they have assumed to be CA's policy or role.'⁵ Media interpretations of development and relief were equally problematic. Benthall has argued that the media has an inbuilt tendency to generate 'crisis' narratives with respect to development issues. In recent years, the rapid technological development of communications media and the more rapid circulation of information has increased the tendency towards simplification and convergence in the substance of popular discourse about development. What has become increasingly evident has been a marked similarity in images and interpretations. The persistence of such interpretations, what Benthall has called 'folk narrative'⁶, was seen to lie in the cultural paradigm of the news room. The implications have been

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media*, p. 188

profound. As Smillie has commented:

'that the media concentrate on disaster and bad news is not news. What is more problematic is their preoccupation with quantitative data rather than qualitative analysis of the context in which an event takes place.'⁷

In other words, media preoccupations are with 'who did what?', 'where?', 'when?', 'how?' but not with 'why?'

The volume and character of media coverage has historically made CA's job of development education increasingly difficult. Not only has the media distorted perceptions of relief and development - typically offering a conventional 'natural' interpretation of the problem and a technocentric solution to it - but by so doing, it has distorted the mission of NGOs such as CA, typically portraying them as neutral 'angels of mercy' rather than as political actors. In turn, CA, institutionally, has found it difficult to ignore the momentum and fund-raising potentials initiated by massive, emotional media coverage. There has been an institutional need - both in terms of immediate fund-raising and long-term public credibility - to be seen to be doing something. This impacted on CA in the Ethiopian famines of 1967 and 1974. Moreover the debate about how the organisation should capitalise on media coverage has been on-going among CA staff. Paul Renshaw has commented on the unforeseen effect of Michael Buerk and Mohamed Amin's film of Korem, Ethiopia, in 1984:

'He [Michael Buerk] succeeded in making an impact where the agencies had not, and we were not prepared for the response from the public, by telephone, letter, financial, offers of help. ...when the media publicity followed, CA was unable to capitalise - absence of overseas personnel (i.e. white faces to be photographed); mechanism of helping through partner programmes - easiest in Eritrea and Tigray. Is this something CA has to live with? Willing to take earlier initiative than most in response to partners - and then leave field to more publicity conscious agencies with overseas staff? And go on to the next and/or continue to work quietly. Xian imperative of "hiding our light under a bushel" - but doesn't get the money in.'⁸

The danger of such a debate, was the extent to which it threatened the independent mission of CA. The media has impacted not just on the educational performance of CA but by setting the agenda, on the organisation's very identity and mission.

⁷ Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar*, p.133

⁸ Paul Renshaw, 'Notes on Ethiopia appeals' (n.d.), (CAO.AF/ME.587)

North-south partnerships:

The challenge of partnership, in the 1950s as in the 1990s, has been one of converting a giving-receiving relationship into one that could transcend money. Already at the World Council of Churches assembly in New Delhi in 1961 it was stated that:

'the static distinction of "receiving church" and "giving church" must go so that all will share spiritual, material and personal gifts in the light of the total economy of the household of God. ...Aid can never be one-way and should not be a one-way affair. Out of their rich cultural heritage, the developing nations have much to contribute to the enrichment of the life of the people of the world as a whole.'⁹

Such language of mutuality and empowerment was also evident in CA's 1987 statement of commitment, 'To Strengthen the Poor':

'We must act strategically to strengthen the arm of the poor until they can stand up to those who so often act against them, and have the power to determine their own development under God.'¹⁰

Operationalising such intentions has proved more difficult. There have been five main reasons for this. Firstly, partnership has required a degree of solidarity that CA has not always been capable of giving. During famine in Ethiopia in the 1980s, the thesis has shown how CA was seriously compromised on its ability to speak out on behalf of those suffering in the north. Similarly, the thesis has shown how in its campaigns, CA's freedom to pursue meaningful and accountable partnership with the politically and economically marginalised, has historically been limited by the dictates of charity law and the sensitivities of its donors and its northern constituency. Secondly, words of mutuality and empowerment are quite simply inadequate in the face of the significance of the uni-directional flow of resources. The vertical bonds of dependence have proved particularly persistent. Conventional interpretations and actions on relief and development are rarely challenged. Further, in order to attract funding, there has been an incentive for southern partners to respond to and comply with an agenda set by their northern partners and in so doing, to internalise the specific discourse used by northern NGOs to justify that funding. As Leach and Mearns have argued:

'while inhabitants of local African environments may themselves participate in the production of ideas about environmental change, they do so with less power to define the terms of debate. As token participants in global and national fora,

⁹ Cited in Taylor, *Not Angels but Agencies*, p. 81

¹⁰ CA, *To Strengthen the Poor*

they may have little chance to express alternatives to the dominant viewpoint. But equally, it is not uncommon for rural inhabitants in their interactions with development fieldworkers to confirm outsiders' preconceived ideas, given the power relations which operate at such "interfaces".¹¹

This author's own experience of interviewing farmers in the Freedom From Hunger Campaign programme's project sites, and in particular the internalising of discourses on women in development and soil erosion, confirmed such an observation. Chapter 1 has explored how the national councils of churches were created and 'moulded' as effective partners in the 1960s. As Michael Taylor, Director of CA, has written:

'then as now the national councils of churches were supported and shaped as instruments of the north, equipped to do what the north required. Then as now they were potentially diverted from an holistic task to a specialised task, from what they might have done if left to themselves to what they did do at the behest of others.'¹²

Similarly, implicit in the strengthening of development initiatives within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, from the 1970s, was an adoption of northern interpretations and priorities, however successful. While examples of resilience and independence have existed among southern partners, for example with the Eritrean Relief Association and the Relief Society of Tigray, the evidence suggests that such partnerships are unique and, typically, it is the north that has set the priorities and the south that has accommodated and adopted them. Thirdly, concepts of participation, empowerment and civil society - guiding words in building partnerships - are under-theorised. The thesis has shown how the de-contextualisation of partners has contributed to processes of marginalisation and that farmers and herders may selectively adopt outsider's idioms and turn them to their own advantage in struggles over identity and resource control. The powers accorded leaders of cooperatives and peasant associations through the Freedom From Hunger Campaign programme indicates that the meaning of 'community' or 'civil society' is complex and political.

Fourthly, 'partnerships' may become distorted by problems of capability and understanding. A major debate within CA, in the mid-1970s, was whether CA's historical commitment to partnership with national councils of churches and churches

¹¹ Melissa Leach & Robin Mearns, 'Environmental change and policy: challenging received wisdom in Africa' in Leach & Mearns (eds.), *The Lie of The Land*, p. 27

¹² Taylor, *Not Angels but Agencies*, p. 139

fulfilled the organisation's strategic commitment to the poor. In Ethiopia, CA's partnership with the Orthodox Church was riddled with ambiguities as to how far understanding and partnership could go. Sarah Hughes of CA has written:

'as an experienced overseas partner put it at the round table, it is impossible for a person from the western tradition to intellectually understand the Orthodox Church, but by experiencing it he/she can arrive at some kind of appreciation. ...experiencing the church ... means understanding what is meant by the often made statement "the people are the church and the church is the people". This includes appreciating the huge numbers of priests (and their families), over 300,000 in all, and the position of the priest within the Orthodox family, as "soul father" to every member. It helps to explain why there is no question in parish councils minds that a project which develops church land in order to provide food and income for the clergy is a community project. ... It has been stated in previous travel reports that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is weak in the field of emergency response and relief. This is still probably true and it is all the more important to try and support and strengthen their efforts at the present time.'¹³

Paul Renshaw has commented in a similar vein:

'in 1980 I went to Addis [Ababa], it was the first meeting of the Ethiopian Orthodox consortium. I sat there with the bishops and we talked straight past one another. It was a cultural experience I shall never forget. They were concerned with saying, "we are the guardians of the faith, we are the repositories of Ethiopian culture, listen to us and our priorities", which were things like printing presses. ...Moreover, they were historically close to the central power, the most hierarchical organisation conceivable, as male-dominated as they come. If you asked the question, "is this an organisation that we can work with in development terms?", it would have been quite easy to say "no". But, CA in those days, even more than it is now, and it still is to some extent, does see the roots of its existence to be in working with the church body out there.'¹⁴

Partnership, for CA, has proved complicated, entailing an ability to understand different perspectives, capabilities and priorities, and ones that have not necessarily fitted in with the fashion-conscious language of development. Historically divided between a commitment to the ecumenical family and to specialised development, the issue of partnership has lead to much internal debate and tension within CA. Strategic attempts by senior CA staff to resolve the basic ambiguity have continually come up against structural constraints, which have in turn reflected the many voices within the organisation.

Fifthly, partnership demands knowing each other, talking to each other and

¹³ Sarah Hughes, 'Report on a visit to Ethiopia to attend the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Interchurch Aid Department Round Table meeting' (7-9 January 1990), (AF/ME 540)

¹⁴ ERD.6, Paul Renshaw

learning from each other. As a non-operational organisation, the physical distance between CA's London office and its partners overseas has imposed a degree of 'arms length' communication. At times, this has been replaced by a more intense relationship. For example, in the heady days of the cross-border operation into Ethiopia when senior figures in CA were in constant contact with the liberation movements' London-based offices and CA staff returned from field trips into Eritrea and Tigray with a personal and intense sense of solidarity and commitment. In the more mundane, day-to-day partnerships, as with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church or the Freedom From Hunger Campaign programme, such enthusiasm, built from close contact, has been absent. While this may be seen as a strength, allowing southern partners more room for independence, initiative and capacity-building, it has also led to misunderstanding and a distancing on the part of CA, from local and national realities and priorities. This has been discussed, in chapter 5, in relation to post-conflict Ethiopia in the 1990s and in chapter 3, in relation to the 1971-75 famine. From 1997, partly in recognition of this problem CA initiated a process of opening key overseas offices. It remains to be seen whether partnerships will be strengthened and transformed by this process.

The thesis has shown how, as a non-operational agency, the nature and effectiveness of CA's partnerships have been crucial to the agency's performance. A comparison of CA's interventions in the 1970s and 1980s famines in Ethiopia has revealed just how crucial they were. Institutionally, CA has made important steps towards securing more effective and flexible relationships in which institutions of the north and the south challenge each other and work together on problems. Such arrangements include the establishment of round tables¹⁵, consortia, country programmes¹⁶, mission statements, ecumenical resource-sharing arrangements¹⁷,

¹⁵ Round table structures were established in 1984 as a way of sharing resources at the national rather than regional level.

¹⁶ Before round table structures came country programmes, started as an experiment in 1976, which brought the churches in a country together to decide on a programme and how much of it they could support themselves before looking for outside funding.

¹⁷ A new resource sharing system was approved by the World Council of Churches central committee in 1982. The proposal insisted that, 'the transfer of funds should take place within a framework of equality and trust relationships based on a common understanding of objectives and priorities. Sharing of resources is a mutual process which requires transparency on all sides.' cited in Taylor, *Not Angels but Agencies*, p. 82

campaigns for structural change. The hopes of such institutional arrangements have however been all too often belied by results. In the words of Michael Taylor, CA's Director, the lesson of the past has been that,

'partnership remains an empty slogan; that words are not matched by deeds; that despite all the fine proposals the actual dynamics between north and south, funding agencies and receiving "partners" remain much the same; that financial considerations all too easily dominate round table discussions and attempts to make shared decisions.'¹⁸

The politics of humanitarianism - relations with states and non-states:

Janet Lacey, CA's first Director, commented about CA's relations with states and role within the broader international humanitarian system:

'the *raison d'être* of a voluntary organisation ... is to be free to pioneer and to be in the front line when need is apparent. While it should work whenever possible with the government and the United Nations ... it must also retain its freedom to agitate for the rights of those in need when the state and the community are falling short of their responsibilities.'¹⁹

This thesis has highlighted a number of constraints that have impacted on CA's freedom to agitate for the rights of those in need. In turn, these have exposed the fundamental contradiction within CA as a charity; the tension between the principle of neutral humanitarianism and the reality of political involvement. Chapter 1 discussed how CA has institutionally found it difficult to pursue a campaigning style, coming up against different levels of awareness and concerns within the organisation about how 'political' it could or should be. As Jenny Borden of CA remarked in 1988:

'Many staff at CA believe that we should not engage in "controversial", "political", "conflictive" situations - for all kinds of good reasons - damage to CA's name, fear of a fall in income, the Charity Commission, a deep seated belief in reconciliation etc.'²⁰

A campaigning style has demanded the institutional ability to mix up education, information, fund-raising and aid. As such it has come up against a number of different voices and concerns within CA, operating at different levels within the organisation's institutional structure. Chapter 1 also highlighted how a strong campaigning style has, in past, upset CA's domestic constituency. In 1983, CA Year's Report commented that:

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 95

¹⁹ Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, p. 104

²⁰ Jenny Borden, memo to Michael Taylor (9 April 1988), (CAO.DIR.208)

'an increasing number of supporters have recently expressed regret or anger that so much of what CA says and writes "has a political flavour". It would not need or have to if so much of the deprivation which we are mandated to meet were not politically caused and politically perpetuated. It is not part of our job, nor within our competence, to apply the necessary political correctives, but because our daily life is spent picking up the piece we have a right and a duty to identify the causes and to refer them to politicians for action.'²¹

By exposing the political nature of CA's work, an institutional campaigning style has proved hard for the charity to implement.

Operationally, CA's independence has been constrained by its changing operational environment. In chapters 1 and 2, the thesis has explored how the role of NGOs, like CA, within the international relief system was enhanced during the 1980s. In particular, within this evolving relief system, NGOs, like CA were being used as an important channel available to donor organisations wishing to provide relief assistance in areas of conflict and disputed sovereignty. This was particularly the case in Ethiopia in the 1980s. Chapters 4 and 5 have highlighted how in this situation, accountability became a big problem for CA. In effect, CA's institutional freedom to pioneer and agitate for the rights of those in need were constrained. The organisation was not able to publicise or speak out openly about the cross-border operation for fear of upsetting donors and the United Nations. Structurally, the evolving operational environment in Ethiopia in the 1980s placed a division between relief and politics. This had profound implications for the independence and accountability of CA's agenda. In particular, it meant that CA's charitable works - supplying relief - were prioritised over human rights concerns - advocacy.

CA's freedom to agitate has also been effected by the nature of its relations with states. In Ethiopia, the difficulties of NGO-state relations have been particularly evident. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, CA confronted the difficulties of how to work independently and, in the 1980s in particular, in direct opposition to the state. In part, CA's ability to pursue an independent path was determined by the nature and capacity of its partners. In part, it remained dependent on the positioning of the international relief system, discussed above.

²¹ CA, 'Year Report' (April 1982-March 1983), (SOAS.CA/J/1)

CA's freedom to be at the 'front line when need is apparent'²² came up against fundamental structural problems. These concerned the politics of humanitarianism; the fact that humanitarianism, or keeping people alive, as in northern Ethiopia in the 1980s or in the Ogaden lowlands in the 1970s, was political. CA's ability, as an organisation made up historically and structurally of different levels of concern and different motivations for action, to define a role within the politics had profound implications on its performance.

The most striking feature of the above analysis, is how closely it resembles the discussions within CA, reflected in the Sinclair Report, in the mid-1970s. This begs the question of whether CA has moved forward at all. Yet, while there has been failure, compromise, and conflict, there has also been successes, both celebrated and silent, and examples of meaningful co-operation. The cross-border operation into Eritrea and Tigray, a programme committed to the politically disadvantaged within the international arena, stood out in particular as an impressive example of a new framework for humanitarian assistance. On a different level, CA's support for the *New Internationalist* and campaigns over such issue as apartheid, debt and overseas aid have helped move the agenda forward over such issues, however modestly. Similarly, CA has helped create and sustain an entire generation of indigenous organisations in Ethiopia. These organisations have taken civil society a step further, recognising and strengthening traditional institutions at village level and, together, they have constituted an important buffer between people and the state. With the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, CA has supported its moves into development and its tentative steps to reach out in different ways to its parishioners. As Paul Renshaw of CA commented:

'I remember they had a parish council programme which was, although in very hierarchical terms, trying to enable the laity to participate, from the local parish. It was an impulse to create structures that would allow the laity to speak. To speak on everything - development and other things. It seems to me to have been an important initiative and has had some success.'²³

²² Lacey, *A Cup of Water*, p. 104

²³ ERD.6, Paul Renshaw

Finally, CA's programmes have in some cases contributed to the improved living standard of the beneficiaries.

In the specific policy environment of Ethiopia and in the broader institutional environment, the thesis has shown that CA's capabilities have increased. However, as indicated in the parallels with the Sinclair Report indicated above, the thesis has also highlighted that key structural and theoretical weaknesses have remained unresolved. Most importantly, CA in the 1990s still faced difficulties in defining a clear strategic voice. Theoretical clarity and institutional strategy remained elusive. The following section explores what lessons a historical analysis of the past offers for the future and how such clarity and strategy may be found.

2. Christian Aid and lessons for the future

Human compassion is an essential component of a more humane world. This thesis supports such a philosophy. What it has questioned however is how humanitarianism has manifested itself as a practical philosophy. Much of the analysis has been driven by the recognition that success in the provision of aid has been overshadowed by failures; that mistakes have been repeated; and that CA is still responding to disasters rather than facilitating development. An institution developed in a previous era, CA, like other NGOs, is today at a major crossroads. It is an interchange where its value and importance is acknowledged, but where it is increasingly challenged by forces and structures which threaten to undermine the very independence that distinguishes it. As in the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, so in the 1990s, CA is at a junction characterised by self-doubt about the agency's accountability, independence and mission. The final part of this chapter seeks to make possible recommendations, based on the lessons from the past, about how CA should move forward.

2.1 *Broadening the research agenda*

One of the issues that emerges from the thesis has been the tendency for CA's policies in Ethiopia to be founded on conventional 'natural' interpretations of

environmental change. Famine, in the 1970s and development, in the 1990s, were de-contextualised and the agency's intervention pursued its own rationality, divorced from local needs and processes. As the thesis has shown, the result was misguided and, in some instance, fundamentally flawed interventions. The policy implication is that for as long as local processes remain peripheral, rather than central, to the rationality of the humanitarian undertaking, it will remain flawed. To move forward, CA needs to broaden the research field, to clarify a new interpretation of change in Africa and develop a new dynamic agenda. Given the power relations through which, as this thesis has argued, orthodoxies are produced and sustained, such an endeavour is clearly not simple. Nevertheless, the evidence assembled in the thesis has pointed towards ways in which the research field can be broadened.

Two issues that have emerged from CA's experience in Ethiopia are the need to work with and build on the understandings and skills of Ethiopia's farmers and herders; and the need to create the enabling conditions under which local resource-management and survival strategies can be pursued effectively. This implies that good policy will require research into environmental change and people's roles in it; research which pays attention to the inhabitant's own experiences and opinions; and which includes historical and political-economy perspectives. Yet as indicated in this introduction, research is unlikely to have practical impact on orthodox thinking and practice without more fundamental changes in the institutional structures through which problem-claims are made, solutions elaborated, and intentions translated into policy and practice. Conventional and alternative interpretations about change in Africa, do not simply draw different conclusions about strategy; they also uphold different social and political commitments and claims. Even in the cases where a particular interpretation can be shown to be false, there will not necessarily be a single alternative analysis which can be shown to be 'truer' to all parties involved, nor policy solutions derived from it which all would find acceptable. Knowledge is conditional, in the sense that it reflects the institutional context in which it is produced. Shifts in interpretations of development should therefore be treated less in terms of their claims to 'truth', and more in terms of the implicit social commitments that underlie them and on the validity of which they

depend. This task, requires a radical shift in the relationship between research and policy as conventionally conceived.

The analysis in this thesis of relief and development reveals degrees of uncertainty associated with knowing the character, direction and strength of causal linkages, and with designing policies that achieve their stated objectives once put into practice. Under such conditions of uncertainty, conventional policy blueprints are of questionable validity. From this perspective, the task of linking research into policy-making shifts to one of broadening the range of problem-claims, and negotiating outcomes among an extended group of actors. The research-policy process is reconceptualised into a more pluralistic, or democratic, approach. As the thesis has revealed, a number of structural problems may be anticipated with this new approach. Firstly, it may be argued that building consensus among actors whose world views and political interests are different is impossible and that exchanges between policy actors with different endowments of power and resources could never be neutral. Yet the argument for a 'democratic' approach to the research-policy process aims precisely at revealing the hidden social and cultural assumptions underlying different actors. Rendering such conflict explicit may enable them to be addressed more openly, rather than remain concealed in hegemonic development interpretations and actions. Secondly, it may be argued that an exposure of plural viewpoints would serve to replace a simple orthodox interpretation with excessive complexity. There is a danger that findings generated by locality may be too complicated to be of practical use to policy makers. In this context Roe has argued that simplified but compelling narratives are in fact necessary to the policy process.²⁴ The challenge is to create equally compelling alternatives, but ones which fit the claims of a different set of stakeholders.

If policy process is to change, then innovative institutional arrangements will be needed and new alliances built, between the south and the north, and, most importantly, between both and the media. This, in turn, will depend upon CA's ability to re-invigorate its message, to tighten up its ideology and clarify its direction. As a first step

²⁴ Emery Roe, 'Development narratives, or making the best of blueprint development' *World Development*, 19 (1991), pp. 287-300

in this process, this thesis has demonstrated the importance of revealing alternative perspectives which challenge conventional interpretations. A second step would be to put such perspectives into circulation both within CA and among its constituency in the north and south.

2.2 Linking good practice with good theory

The implication of chapter 3 was that famine victims have been ill-served by famine theory and, consequently, by the practice of famine relief. The argument of the above section has been that better research will lead to better policy. This section reveals that CA has another, more easily operative, tool for discovering good theory and policy: its history. This section looks at the policy implications that can be drawn from CA's involvement in the cross-border operation into Ethiopia in the 1980s. Chapter 5 has shown how the cross-border operation provided an example of an innovative and successful programme of famine relief and prevention. In particular, it has shown how this success depended on the performance of the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and the Relief Society of Tigray (REST). Can the operation be used as a theoretical and practical framework for future action?

As discussed in chapter 5, the success of ERA and REST's relief programmes rested to a large extent on their reliance on village committees and the subsequent accountability of aid at all levels. Most importantly, the unique relationship of the guerrilla Fronts to the peasants - in which the physical survival of the peasantry in the face of famine was linked to the political fortunes of the Fronts - enabled the implementation of a truly participatory relief model. As an independent observer noted:

'The Tigrayan People's Liberation Front would not have achieved its present level on internal security and territorial supremacy had it not been for the widespread cooperation and support of the peasantry in Tigray. Similarly, REST, as a truly grassroots organisation, is able to draw upon precisely this same resource which is likely to ensure the ultimate success of any relief programme launched in the region.'²⁵

²⁵ Jon Bennett, 'Preliminary report on Tigray' (October 1982 - January 1983), (CAO.AF/ME.441)

ERA and REST's undoubtedly high humanitarian credentials rested not on the ability to provide relief - indeed the one constant throughout this period was the limited resources at their disposal - but on the relationship with the people they were assisting.

In government-held areas, the relief model was very different. The government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission operation was run on a highly centralised basis with a strictly hierarchical structure. Decisions, even on local level food distributions, were taken in Addis Ababa. Very little freedom of action was left to the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission regional representatives who remained largely subject to the control of the regional party secretaries.²⁶ The structure of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission slowed down the decision-making process, and as Duffield and Prendergast have argued: 'rather than empowering populations, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission concentrated power within itself.'²⁷ An independent food assessment mission in 1987 noted severe failings in the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission's distribution system. The survey revealed that:

'in some places the registration for relief by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission required payment of a fee - a most remarkable way of covering the costs of administering the distribution of externally donated food. In other instances, registration was a matter of being on the books of the government-instituted local peasant associations, which people living beyond the *de facto* control of these local authorities naturally are loath to expose themselves to.'²⁸

Independent observations of food being denied to people in government-held towns on suspicion of supporting the Fronts, of food being exploited to corral people in preparation for resettlement, of widespread diversion to the military and of misinformation about access produced a picture of accommodation with violence, in strong contrast to the relief management system in non-government areas.

NGO operations in government areas also contrasted to the integrated community based relief systems developed by the Fronts. These have been examined in detail elsewhere and it is proposed here only to describe the principal elements.²⁹ The relief model may be characterised as externally-managed and technically-orientated. It

²⁶ Jansson, Harris & Penrose, *The Ethiopian Famine*, p. 46

²⁷ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 153

²⁸ Leeds University Agricultural & Rural Development Unit, 'Eritrea: food & agriculture assessment study' (April 1988), (CAO.AF/ME.434)

²⁹ Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, pp. 153-155

was the NGO representatives who made the key decisions concerning entitlement and there were no relations of political accountability between the representatives and the beneficiaries. In this respect local resources and skills were not recognised and opportunities for involving local communities in the management of their own relief missed. Most significantly, in government areas, the creation of emergency relief camps persisted, despite the well-documented public health risks of such structures. As Jacques Willemse, former Chairman of the Emergency Relief Desk, argued:

‘the international relief community killed tens of thousands of people by trapping them into the hunger camps in Makelle etc. and people knew, even at that time, that if you bring starving people together in one place you get a high level of communicable diseases - measles, diarrhoea etc. - in seconds. And the diseases kill more people than the actual starvation. The problem is that relief camps are good for publicity.’³⁰

Control of populations, whether by international aid agencies concerned with maximising the effectiveness of food distribution and visibility of their inputs, or by soldiers concerned to depopulate specific areas, exposed the powerless to major health risks, while, according to one analysis allowing, ‘the powerful (internationally and nationally) to meet their objectives.’³¹ The aura of neutrality and charitable altruism, reinforced by fund-raising images of food hand-outs to the victims, enabled NGOs and their donors to maintain a political distance while exerting some control over the resources disbursed. As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, it was a distance that proved destructive to people’s physical and political survival. Few NGOs on the government side were in dialogue either with the victims of famine or with the Derg. Umbrella organisations such as Christian Relief and Development Association, a forum composed of national and international aid agencies and CA’s main partner in government-controlled areas, and the Churches Drought Action Africa/Ethiopia maintained a profile as operational bodies whose main links were with donors.³² Aid agencies in Ethiopia tended to keep their distance from the Derg. This contrasted with the clear relations of reciprocity and accountability between ERA and REST and their respective Fronts in Eritrea and Tigray.

³⁰ ERD.3, Jacques Willemse

³¹ Macrae & Zwi, ‘Famine, complex emergencies and international policy in Africa’, p. 27

³² Duffield & Prendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks*, p. 155

A key issue that emerges is how the long-term success of the operation was largely determined by the nature of the controlling authorities' relationship with civilian populations. This point is usually overlooked or ignored in most analyses of interventions, but it is perhaps in the long run the single most important lesson of the intervention experience in Ethiopia. Political dialogue and relations of accountability are vital to the success of any relief programme. In addition, the full participation and approval of local political parties and institutions is crucial. This support was a determining factor in the success of ERA and REST. In government areas, Cutler reported that the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission was rendered virtually incapable of carrying out its mandate through lack of support from the government.³³ The cross-border operation reveals how an effective relief model needs to move beyond notions of 'neutral' charity. It needs to engage constructively with civil society and, particularly in cases of complex political emergency, analyse processes of change in a more dynamic way. As Teklewoini Assefa, Director of REST, argued:

'on the government side most of the aid agencies were charity-oriented and were only involved in relief and not linked to rehabilitation/development activity. The approach of the cross-border operation was very different. It was based on change. There was a clear vision of that change and everything was linked to the medium and long-term.'³⁴

The success of the cross-border operation into Eritrea and Tigray was ultimately determined by the political structures that existed in the non-government areas. It was the relations of accountability that ensured that famine prevention was undertaken as a political obligation.

The starting point for a new framework for theory and practice should thus perhaps lie with an understanding of those who suffer famines themselves. As Hendrie has observed:

'the unproblematic assumption that responsibility for famine victims belongs to the international community is rarely commented on, although it is a crucial aspect of the de-contextualisation of famine from its socio-economic and political roots'³⁵.

³³ Cutler, 'The development of the 1983-5 famine'

³⁴ REST.4, Teklewoini Asseffa

³⁵ Hendrie, 'Knowledge and power', pp. 70-71

If there are perceived to be only 'victims' of famine, it becomes hard to credit the idea that famine is a process, with culprits and beneficiaries, and easier to credit the idea that famine is an apocalyptic event whose manifestations must be brought under control by humanitarian institutions. The implication of the above analysis is that the role of NGOs like CA and international government organisations is secondary as a means of famine control; that famines happen because governments allow them to happen; and that relief should be redirected towards enforcing accountable systems. Wolde Mariam has argued for Ethiopia, that starvation has been a concomitant of authoritarianism and that only responsive government and better protection of human rights could provide a strategy for preventing its recurrence.³⁶ Such a view echoed Sen's observation that upholding liberal civil and political rights provided protection from famine. De Waal has gone further and has written of a 'social contract' that placed a specific political obligation on rulers to prevent famine as a basis for their political legitimacy: 'in the most effective anti-famine social contracts, famine is a political scandal: it is enforced by changing a government that allows it to happen.'³⁷ He has argued that while liberal civil rights and the existence of independent institutions such as uncensored media and free political association are important, on their own they are not sufficient to ensure protection from famine.

Until the complex dimensions and local interpretations of famine and development are recognised and incorporated, institutional practices will remain detached from reality and power exercised often to the detriment of the intended beneficiaries. Conventional analyses of famine have concentrated on the losers, allowing donors and NGOs to maintain a political distance. What has been neglected are the winners and the possibility that famine reflects economic and political processes in which power is exercised to the advantage of the politically strong. To ignore the politics is itself a political act. As a western diplomat in Ethiopia remarked in 1985:

³⁶ Wolde Mariam, *Rural Vulnerability*, pp. 102-116

³⁷ De Waal, 'Human rights', Introduction, p. 7

‘what the government has to consider is can they afford another major military operation and can they count on the donors to continue supporting the relief effort while they are fighting.’³⁸

The cross-border operation provided important lessons as to theory and practice. Most importantly, it demonstrated that relief and development are about human rights and justice, that short-term charitable imperatives based on conventional interpretations fail to protect such rights and that ultimately agencies need to make real political and strategic choices in their interventions. What is called for is a new ideology of humanitarianism; one that does not separate humanitarianism from politics but rather sees technical solutions in their political context (resettlement programmes are typically presented as relief strategy, their political function of controlling populations ignored); one that engages with the political landscape (the relationship between ruler and ruled); and one that supports some kind of social contract that places political obligations on ruler. In particular, the notion of neutrality and of apolitical humanitarianism requires thorough critique and the way forward needs to be guided by a real theoretical and practical commitment to ‘solidarity’.

The thesis has however also shown that CA’s interventions in Ethiopia have been determined as much by theory as by structure. In this respect, the analysis has touched on the structures internal to CA and those that relate to the broader international relief community and the economic world order. The challenge for CA has been, and continues to be, how to define its position within this economic and political order vis-à-vis its donors, the host state, the media, its northern constituency, its beneficiaries and its partners. This comes back to the need to broaden its research agenda and re-invigorate its message discussed above. It also relates to the task of circulating and promoting that agenda, which will be discussed below.

2.3 Development education

As discussed in chapter 1, CA has historically faced a number of problems in clarifying and promoting its agenda. As Jenny Borden commented in 1990: ‘We are not

³⁸ Reported in *The New York Times*, 9 January 1985 & cited in Clay and Holcomb, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine*, p. 225

good at bringing the real experiences of our partners and their struggles to our supporters in this country.’³⁹ While CA in its organisational ethos has moved away from concepts of philanthropy, welfare and social care, towards ideas of sustainable development, community participation and social justice, it has not taken its donors and the broader public with them.⁴⁰ Development education has had little effect in galvanising public opinion behind the urgent development challenges that CA faces on a daily basis or in informing public opinion about the real nature of those challenges. To move forward, CA needs to find a way of leading on such issues. Broadening its research agenda and mobilising informed public opinion around such an agenda would be one step. Building new alliances, aimed at creating public ownership of both problems and solutions; and at finding ways to help governments and donors make the commitment that will be necessary for real change, would be a second step. As one analyst has argued: ‘enlightened altruism rather than blind compassion, what de Tocqueville called “self-interest properly understood”: this is likely to make the most headway in the years to come.’⁴¹

Janet Lacey, CA’s first Director, argued in the 1960s:

‘...Perhaps the primary task of the governmental and non-governmental organisations alike is to help the ordinary man to try and comprehend the background of the great problems of our time and so give him the information he needs to help him to make his choice.’⁴²

That the debates around such ‘choice’ have been interpreted in neutral charitable terms, rather than in political, human rights terms remains a major failing. The challenge that lies ahead is for CA to provide leadership and convey a different message, one that can inspire ordinary people as well as the media.

Throughout its history, CA’s performance and capability as a charity in the world of relief and development, has continued to be influenced and constrained by a number of structural and ideological contradictions. These contradictions have reflected

³⁹ Jenny Borden, memo to Michael Taylor (27 April 1990), (CAO.AF/ME.589)

⁴⁰ ERD.6, Paul Renshaw; CA.5, Sarah Hughes: & ERD.7, Jenny Borden

⁴¹ Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar*, p. 257

⁴² Janet Lacey, ‘The development apocalypse’ (Oxford annual conference: the role of the voluntary agency in development, n.d), (SOAS.CA/I/15.4)

the organisational origins of CA, the individual motivations among its staff and constituencies, the different institutional purposes inherent in its broad mandate and the changing ideological and structural environment in which it operates. In particular the thesis has highlighted the difficulty for CA to find a voice, at once a symptom of these contradictions and a cause. Historically, CA has been an organisation debating the tensions, trade-offs and contradictions between its goals and activities, between its dreams and the reality. It has restructured and fine-tuned its mission statements. Ultimately, it has lacked intellectual sharpness and clarity in its strategy and has failed to become a prophetic organisation. It has been the rationale of this thesis that the way forward for aid agencies, such as CA must lie through establishing institutional memory and from that institutionalised processes of learning. As Smillie concluded in his recent exploration of 'the alms bazaar':

'knowledge, combined with heart and commitment, has always been a key to development, and moving away from *ad hoc* charitable amateurism towards lasting, longer-term solutions, and the policies needed to sustain them, will require politically aware, focused, specialised organisations that can learn, that can remember and share what they learn, and that are prepared to build on what they remember.'⁴³

This historical analysis of CA's interventions in Ethiopia, is a first attempt to establish a body of knowledge, understanding and theory, upon which CA may be able to build.

⁴³ Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar*, p. 241

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In the UK interviews were conducted periodically with current and former CA officials. Three separate field trips to Ethiopia and Eritrea were undertaken, with extensive travel within the countries. In the main, research consisted of interviews with CA partner organisations, government officials, academics, local officials, farmer and women's group. Various programme sites, including Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Freedom From Hunger Campaign programme sites, were visited.

Field work dates:

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The files in this archive have been catalogued in sections by region, and labeled according to the following codes:

A	Africa
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D	Directorate
E	Europe / UK
I	Organisation
J	Publicity material

Two deposits were made. The first deposit, 1 June 1985, covers the 1950s and goes up to 1970, although the publicity material goes up to 1984. The second deposit, 1990, covers the 1970s.

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